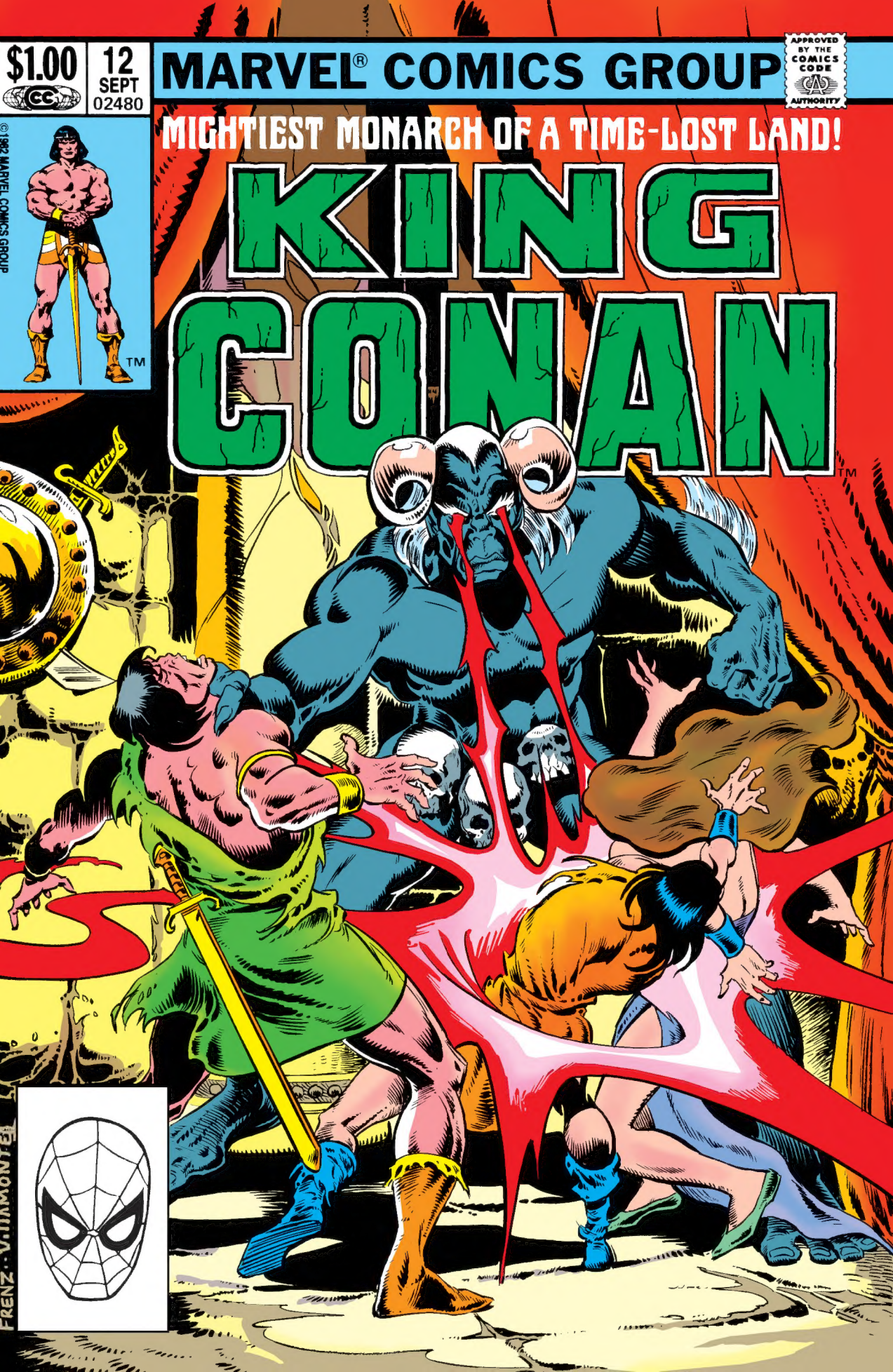
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MIGHTIEST MONARCH OF A TIME-LOST LAND!
KING CONAN
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FRENZ · VILLAMONTE

STAN LEE PRESENTS: KING CONAN
Featuring The Epic Adventurer Created By ROBERT E. HOWARD
THE TOMBS UNDER TARANTIA
IT IS DEEP NIGHT IN THE CAPITAL OF AQUILONIA --AND, SEEMINGLY SAFE UNDER A VELVET SKY OF MOON AND STARS, MOST OF TARANTIA SLEEPS.
THE EXCEPTIONS ARE FEW--A GUARD OF THE WATCH SUFFERING A POOR DRAW IN THE DUTY ROSTER, A TAVERNKEEP MADE SURLY BY THE DEMANDS OF HIS CUSTOMERS, NOW CLOSING UP IN WEARY DISGUST...
...AND, THIS NIGHT, THE VERY MONARCH OF AQUILONIA--RIDING FULL-GALLOP THROUGH THE DESERTED STREETS, AS IF IN PURSUIT OF A GRINNING DEMON STRAIGHT FROM HELL.
THE KING--?
AYE.
TROUBLE?
NAY--HE SIMPLY LIKES TO RIDE HARD, USUALLY ON HOT NIGHTS.
DOUG MOENCH SCRIPT
RON FRENZ BREAKDOWNS
RICARDO VILLAMONTE FINISHES
JOE ROSEN- LETTERS
GEORGE ROUSSOS- COLORS
LOUISE JONES EDITOR
JIM SHOOTER EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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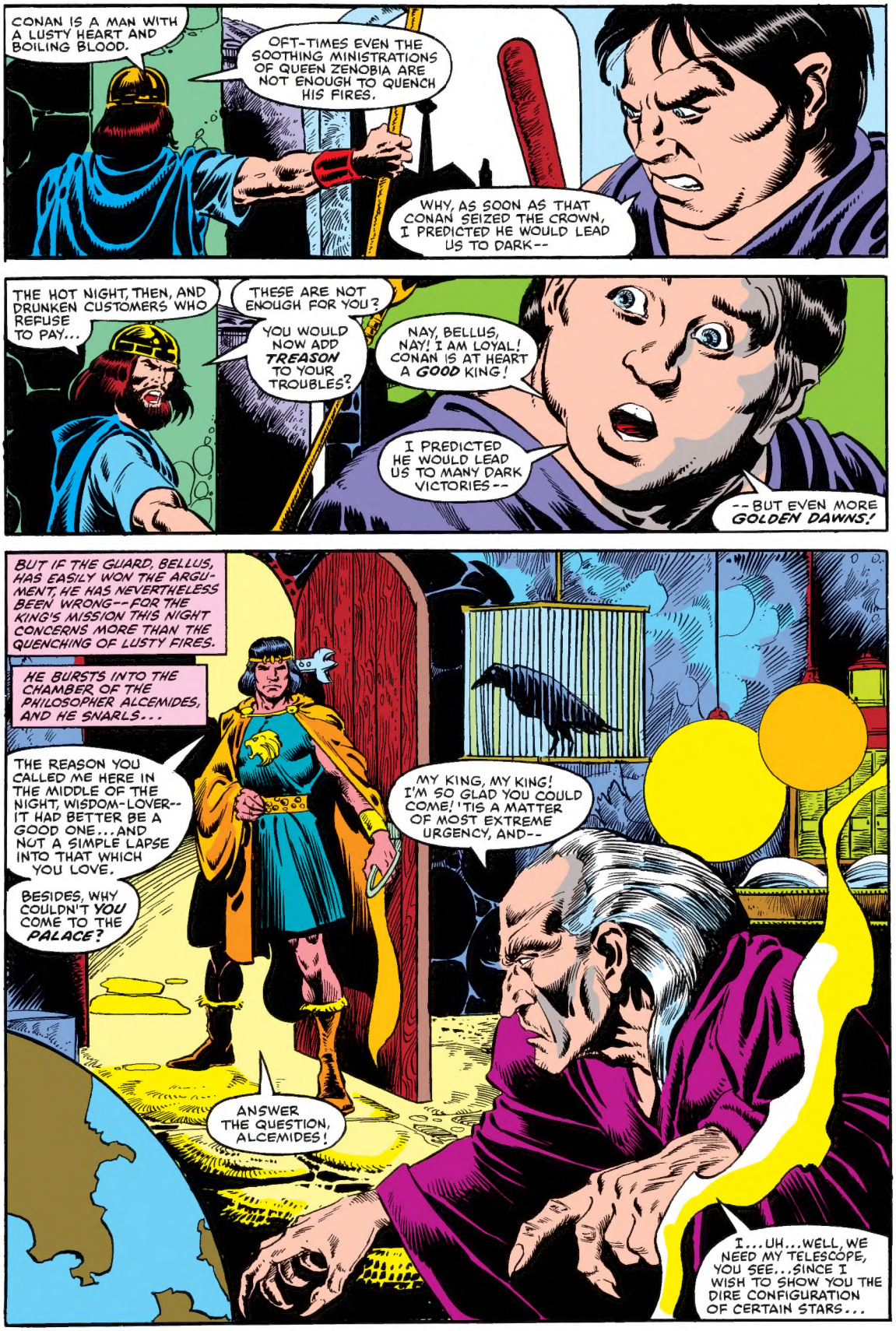
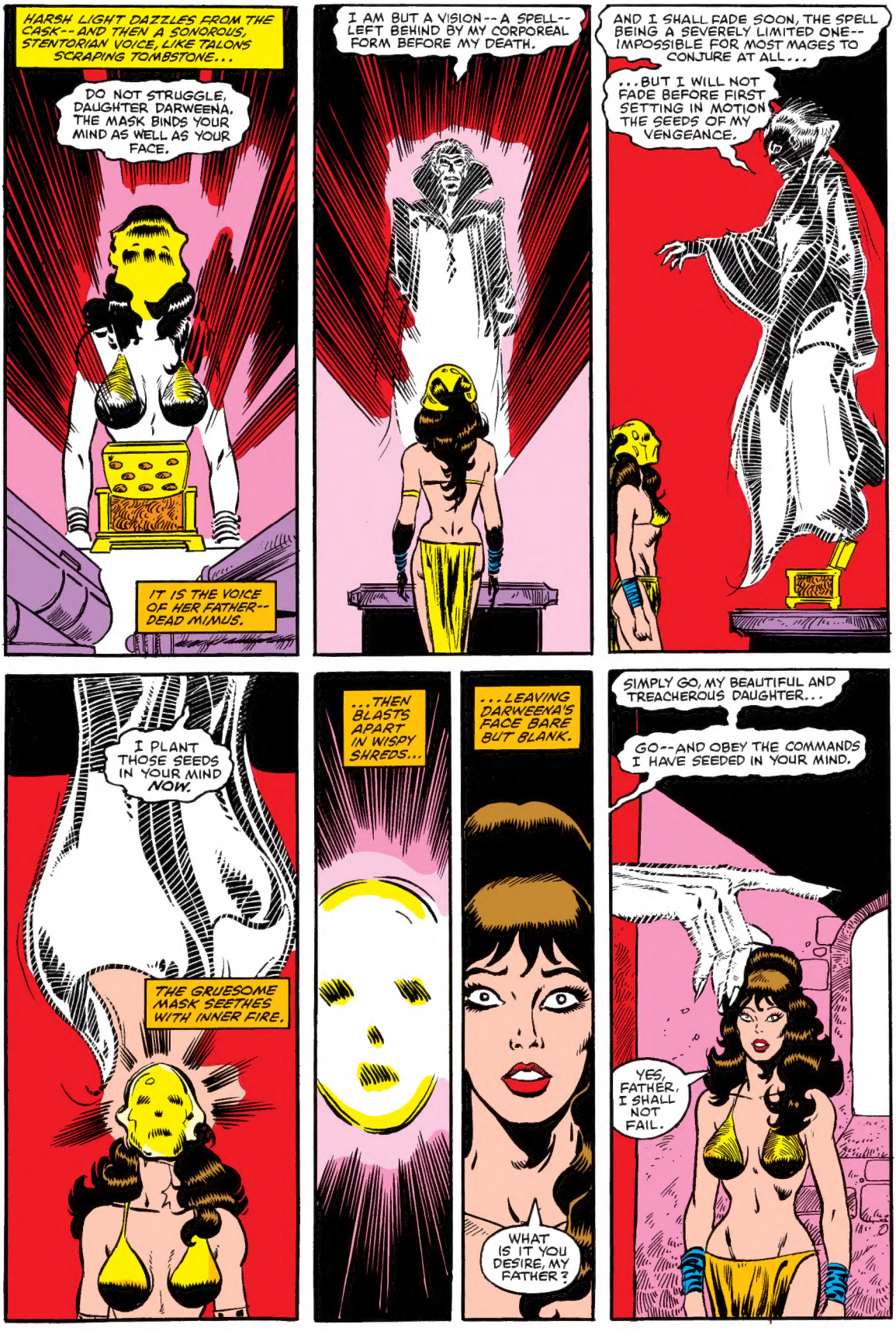
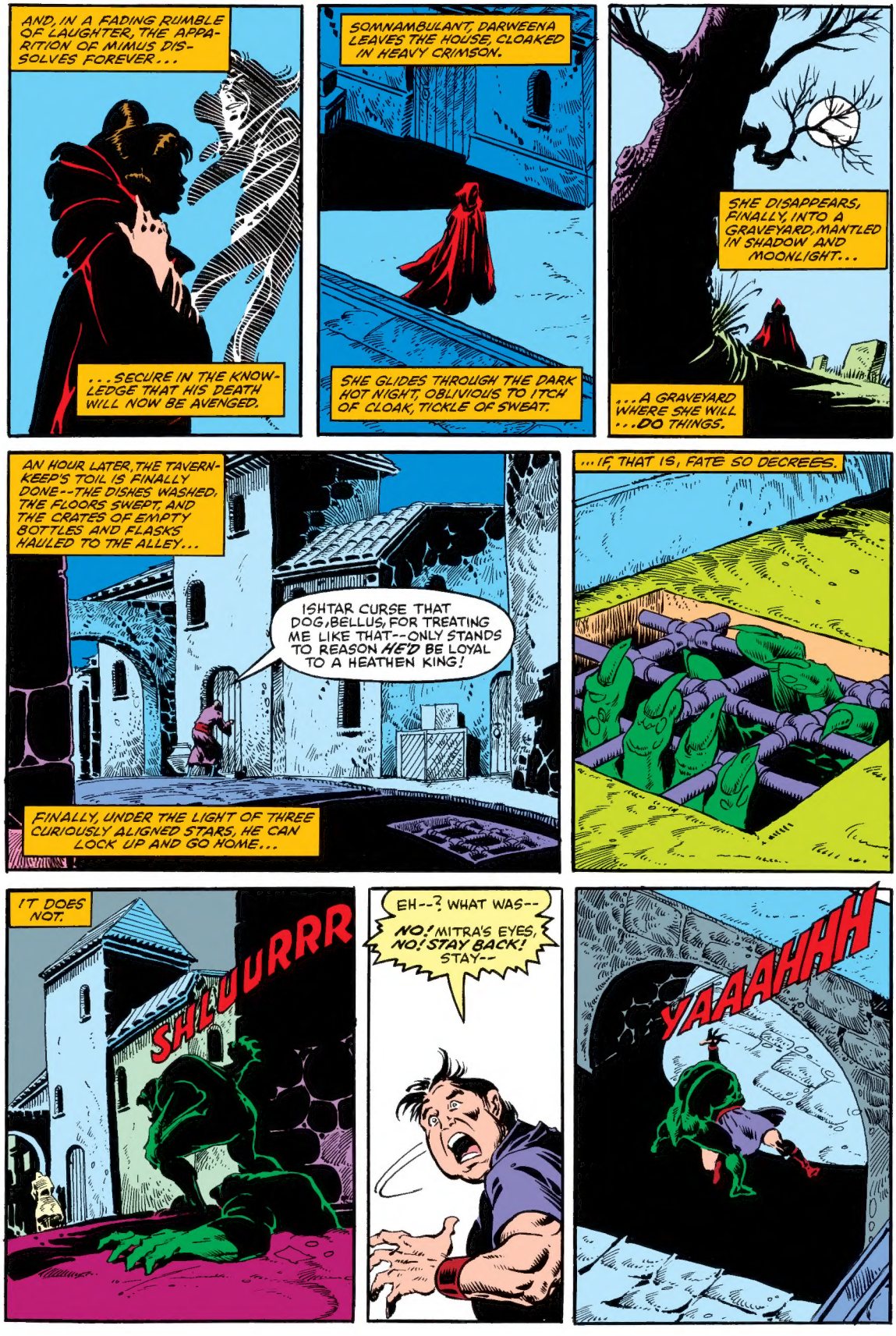
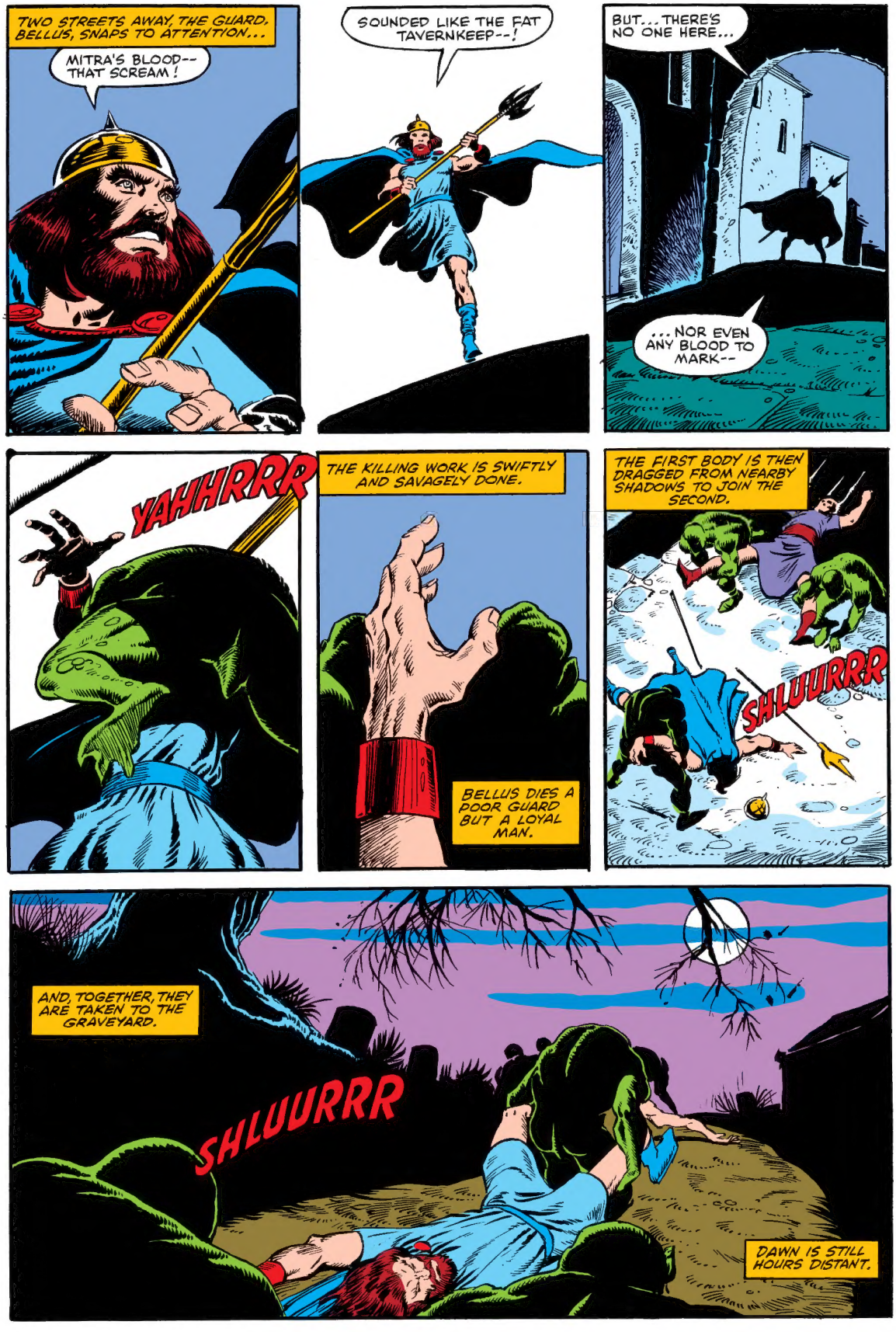

CONAN IS A MAN WITH A LUSTY HEART AND BOILING BLOOD.
OFT-TIMES EVEN THE SOOTHING MINISTRATIONS OF QUEEN ZENOBIA ARE NOT ENOUGH TO QUENCH HIS FIRES.
WHY, AS SOON AS THAT CONAN SEIZED THE CROWN, I PREDICTED HE WOULD LEAD US TO DARK--
THE HOT NIGHT, THEN, AND DRUNKEN CUSTOMERS WHO REFUSE TO PAY...
THESE ARE NOT ENOUGH FOR YOU?
YOU WOULD NOW ADD TREASON TO YOUR TROUBLES?
NAY, BELLUS, NAY! I AM LOYAL! CONAN IS AT HEART A GOOD KING!
I PREDICTED HE WOULD LEAD US TO MANY DARK VICTORIES--
--BUT EVEN MORE GOLDEN DAWNS!
BUT IF THE GUARD, BELLUS, HAS EASILY WON THE ARGUMENT, HE HAS NEVERTHELESS BEEN WRONG--FOR THE KING'S MISSION THIS NIGHT CONCERNS MORE THAN THE QUENCHING OF LUSTY FIRES.
HE BURSTS INTO THE CHAMBER OF THE PHILOSOPHER ALCEMIDES, AND HE SNARLS...
THE REASON YOU CALLED ME HERE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT, WISDOM-LOVER--IT HAD BETTER BE A GOOD ONE...AND NOT A SIMPLE LAPSE INTO THAT WHICH YOU LOVE.
BESIDES, WHY COULDN'T YOU COME TO THE PALACE?
MY KING, MY KING! I'M SO GLAD YOU COULD COME! 'TIS A MATTER OF MOST EXTREME URGENCY, AND--
ANSWER THE QUESTION, ALCEMIDES!
I...UH...WELL, WE NEED MY TELESCOPE, YOU SEE...SINCE I WISH TO SHOW YOU THE DIRE CONFIGURATION OF CERTAIN STARS...

THERE IS A SYSTEM OF BELIEF, YOU SEE, WHICH HOLDS THAT MAN'S DESTINY IS GOVERNED BY MOVEMENTS IN THE HEAVENS, DO YOU SEE, MY KING?
AYE...
...AND I SEE NAUGHT BUT TWINKLING STARS, LARGE AND SMALL --THE SAME AS ANY OTHER CLEAR NIGHT.
BUT DO YOU NOT SEE HOW THREE OF THE BRIGHTER STARS ARE NOW CLUSTERED IN AN OMINOUS PATTERN--?
I SEE THEM, BUT--
WAIT--NOW I SEE A FALLING STAR--STREAKING ACROSS THE FACE OF THE OTHERS...
WHAT?! THEN THIS IS THE WORST SIGN POSSIBLE! THE STARS WERE ALREADY IN DREAD CONJUNCTION, THE WORST IN YEARS, BODING PORTENTS FOR TOMORROW--AND NOW THIS!
ANCIENT EVIL LURKS IN THE VASTNESS BETWEEN STARS, YOU KNOW--VILE DEMONS...
I THOUGHT THE HEAVENS BELONGED TO THE GODS.
GODS, DEMONS --WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE? THEY'RE ALL CRUEL IN THE AFFAIRS OF MEN--THE DEMONS ARE SIMPLY MORE ACTIVE ABOUT IT. HAVE YOU ANYTHING IMPORTANT SCHEDULED FOR TOMORROW--ANYTHING YOU SHOULD FEAR?
ON THE CONTRARY, ALCEMIDES, I HAVE CAUSE FOR REJOICING.
MY SON CONN RETURNS FROM THE BARRACKS, HAVING COMPLETED HIS FIRST TRAINING FOR THE ARMY.
THE WINDOW EXPLODES.
A RAVEN!!
IT FLUTTERS TO CONAN'S FEET.
TWITCHES.
FLOPS.
AND LIES STILL.

NOT FAR FROM ALCEMIDES' ABODE...
--THERE STANDS THE HOME OF THE SORCERER MIMUS, RECENTLY SLAIN BY CONAN.*
SEE KING CONAN 10. -- LOUISE.
INSIDE, JUST AS ALCEMIDES' CHAMBER IS CRAMMED WITH THE PARAPHERNALIA OF ARCANE SCIENCE, SO TOO IS MIMUS' HOME CLUTTERED... WITH ARTIFACTS OF SORCERY.
DARWEENA NOW PORES THROUGH HER LATE FATHER'S POSSESSIONS...
WOULD THAT I COULD HAVE HALTED HIS SCHEMES WITHOUT BETRAYING HIM TO THE KING... AND CAUSING HIS DEATH.
AND YET, THOUGH HE GAVE ME MY LIFE... HE DESERVED TO DIE.
BEST, NOW, TO RID MYSELF OF ALL HIS BOOKS AND FETISHES...
BEST TO SIMPLY BANISH HIM FROM MEMORY.
BUT THEN, DARWEENA'S EYES ARE CAUGHT BY A VIEW OF THE NIGHTED HEAVENS...
SHE TURNS TO THE WINDOW, GAZING OUTWARD, UPWARD...
AND THERE IS SOMETHING ABOUT THE STARS WHICH FILLS HER WITH BOTH INEFFABLE SADNESS AND CHILLING DREAD.
IT REQUIRES CONSCIOUS EFFORT TO TURN FROM THE WINDOW, HER SOFT WHITE SKIN STIPPLED WITH GOOSE-FLESH...
YES--BEST TO DESTROY EVERYTHING AT ONCE.
BUT AGAIN SHE PAUSES, HER EYES THIS TIME DRAWN TO THE SHIMMERING PLAY OF STARLIGHT ON A BURNISHED BOX.
SHE HAS SEEN THE SMALL CASK MANY TIMES BEFORE...
...BUT IT HAS NEVER LOOKED LIKE THIS.
AGAINST HER BETTER JUDGMENT, AND OPENLY TREMBLING NOW, SHE FEELS COMPELLED TO DO SOMETHING WITH THE ORNATE BOX...
...TO... TO OPEN IT...
...AND HER SCREAM IS INSTANTLY SMOTHERED.

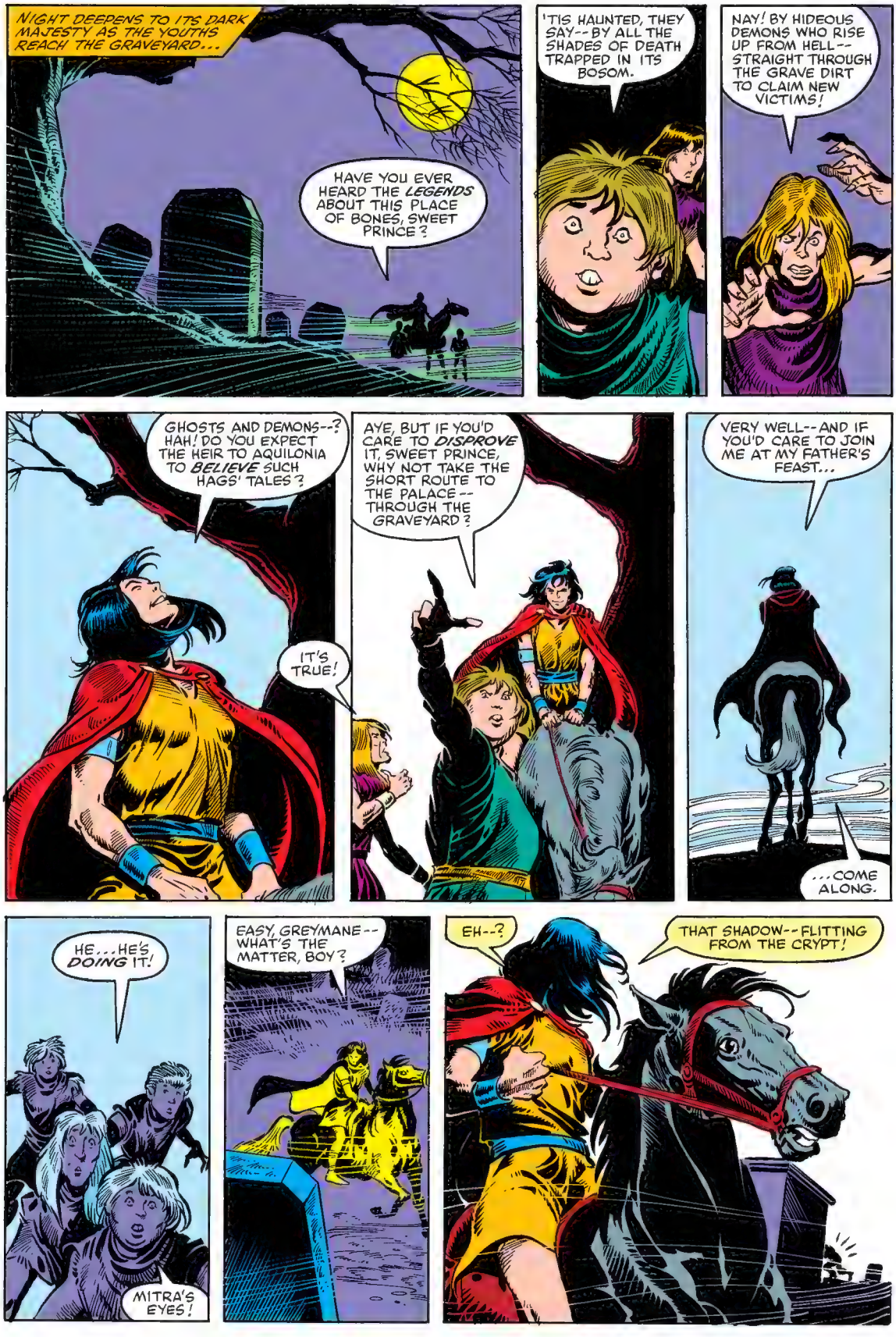

HARSH LIGHT DAZZLES FROM THE CASK--AND THEN A SONOROUS, STENTORIAN VOICE, LIKE TALONS SCRAPING TOMBSTONE...
DO NOT STRUGGLE, DAUGHTER DARWEENA. THE MASK BINDS YOUR MIND AS WELL AS YOUR FACE.
IT IS THE VOICE OF HER FATHER--DEAD MIMUS.
I AM BUT A VISION--A SPELL--LEFT BEHIND BY MY CORPOREAL FORM BEFORE MY DEATH.
AND I SHALL FADE SOON, THE SPELL BEING A SEVERELY LIMITED ONE--IMPOSSIBLE FOR MOST MAGES TO CONJURE AT ALL...
...BUT I WILL NOT FADE BEFORE FIRST SETTING IN MOTION THE SEEDS OF MY VENGEANCE.
I PLANT THOSE SEEDS IN YOUR MIND NOW.
THE GRUESOME MASK SEETHES WITH INNER FIRE.
...THEN BLASTS APART IN WISPY SHREDS...
...LEAVING DARWEENA'S FACE BARE BUT BLANK.
WHAT IS IT YOU DESIRE, MY FATHER?
SIMPLY GO, MY BEAUTIFUL AND TREACHEROUS DAUGHTER...
GO--AND OBEY THE COMMANDS I HAVE SEEDED IN YOUR MIND.
YES, FATHER, I SHALL NOT FAIL.

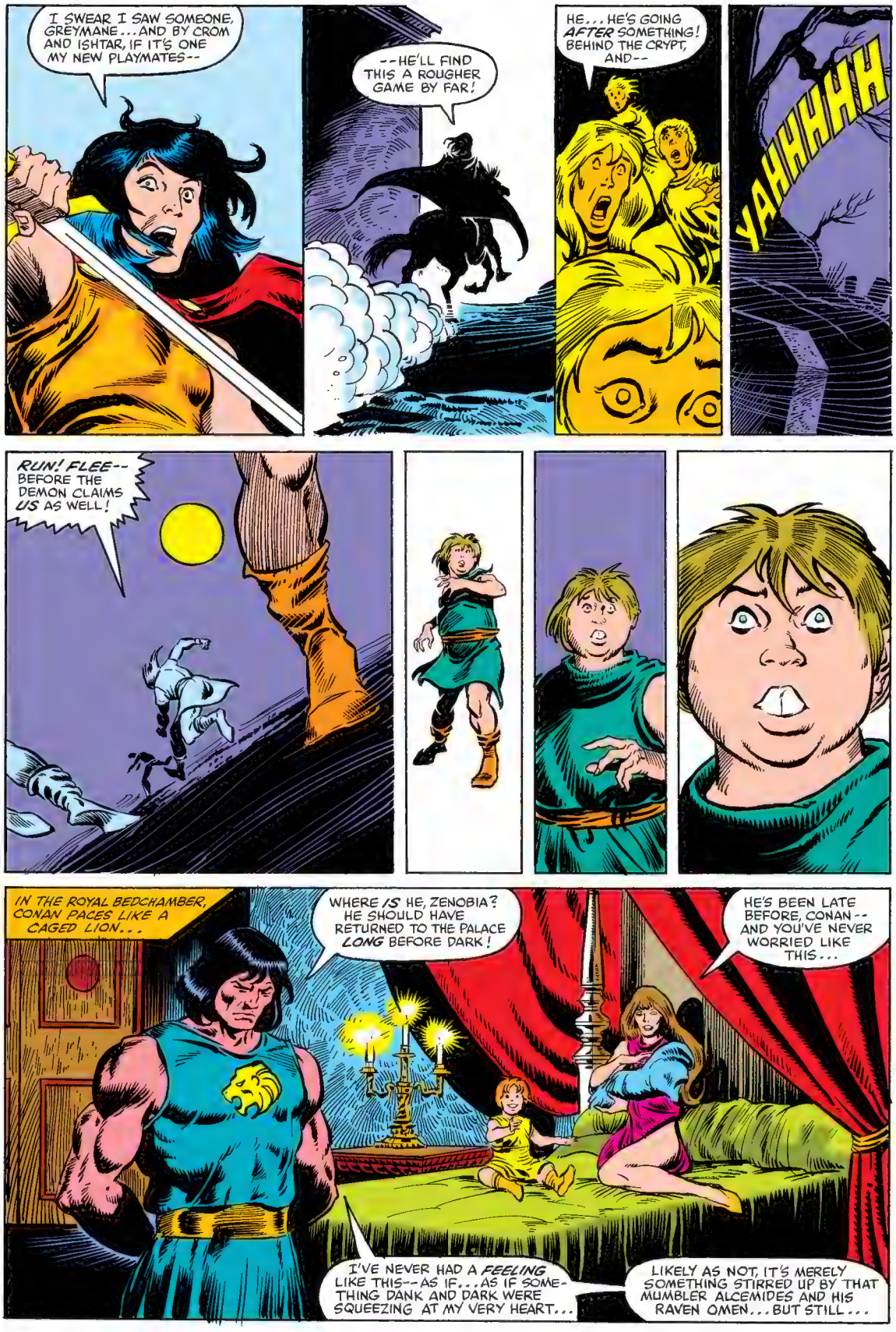

AND, IN A FADING RUMBLE OF LAUGHTER, THE APPARITION OF MIMUS DISSOLVES FOREVER...
...SECURE IN THE KNOWLEDGE THAT HIS DEATH WILL NOW BE AVENGED.
SOMNAMBULANT, DARWEENA LEAVES THE HOUSE, CLOAKED IN HEAVY CRIMSON.
SHE GLIDES THROUGH THE DARK HOT NIGHT, OBLIVIOUS TO ITCH OF CLOAK, TICKLE OF SWEAT.
SHE DISAPPEARS, FINALLY, INTO A GRAVEYARD, MANTLED IN SHADOW AND MOONLIGHT...
...A GRAVEYARD WHERE SHE WILL ...DO THINGS.
AN HOUR LATER, THE TAVERN-KEEP'S TOIL IS FINALLY DONE--THE DISHES WASHED, THE FLOORS SWEPT, AND THE CRATES OF EMPTY BOTTLES AND FLASKS HAULED TO THE ALLEY...
ISHTAR CURSE THAT DOG, BELLUS, FOR TREATING ME LIKE THAT--ONLY STANDS TO REASON HE'D BE LOYAL TO A HEATHEN KING!
FINALLY, UNDER THE LIGHT OF THREE CURIOUSLY ALIGNED STARS, HE CAN LOCK UP AND GO HOME...
...IF, THAT IS, FATE SO DECREES.
IT DOES NOT.
SHLUURRR
EH--? WHAT WAS--
NO! MITRA'S EYES, NO! STAY BACK! STAY--
YAAAHHH


TWO STREETS AWAY, THE GUARD, BELLUS, SNAPS TO ATTENTION...
MITRA'S BLOOD-- THAT SCREAM!
SOUNDED LIKE THE FAT TAVERNKEEP--!
BUT... THERE'S NO ONE HERE...
...NOR EVEN ANY BLOOD TO MARK--
YAHHRRR
THE KILLING WORK IS SWIFTLY AND SAVAGELY DONE.
BELLUS DIES A POOR GUARD BUT A LOYAL MAN.
THE FIRST BODY IS THEN DRAGGED FROM NEARBY SHADOWS TO JOIN THE SECOND.
SHLUURRR
AND, TOGETHER, THEY ARE TAKEN TO THE GRAVEYARD.
SHLUURRR
DAWN IS STILL HOURS DISTANT.

DAWN...
IT WAS A LONG RIDE BACK TO THE CITY, CONN...
AYE, BUT AT LEAST THE NIGHT WAS WARM AND THE STARS BRIGHT--AND WORTH IT TO GET BACK TO TARANTIA.
YOUR FATHER WILL BE PROUD, LAD--YOU'VE DONE WELL IN YOUR TRAINING.
WITH YOU AS MY SWORD-TUTOR, HOW COULD I FAIL?
BUT I AM ANXIOUS TO SEE MY FATHER, AND MY MOTHER AS WELL--I'LL BE FINE FROM HERE.
I DON'T KNOW, CONN... YOUR FATHER ENTRUSTED ME WITH YOUR SAFETY...
I THINK I'D BEST ESCORT YOU TO THE PALACE GATES.
I CAN FIND MY OWN WAY THROUGH THE CITY, TUTOR! BESIDES, IF MY TRAINING WENT SO WELL, SHOULD I NOT BE CAPABLE OF TAKING CARE OF MYSELF IN OUR VERY CAPITAL--?
WHAT COULD HAPPEN HERE IN TARANTIA THAT A NEWLY TOUGHENED SOLDIER COULD NOT HANDLE?
VERY WELL, CONN, BUT HAVE A CARE--YOU HEAR ME, LAD?
DON'T WORRY, TUTOR--I'M NEARLY A FULL-GROWN MAN NOW.
BUT, STILL A BOY AT HEART FOR ALL HIS BLUSTER, CONN SOON REINS UP IN A MORE SQUALID SECTOR OF THE CITY...
...ATTRACTED BY THE BOISTEROUS SOUNDS OF ROUGH PLAY...

LOOK THERE...
AYE--WHO'S THIS ON THE FANCY STEED?
I AM NAMED CONN, SON OF CONAN.
WELL, WELL--THE KING'S BABE, EH? AND COVETING OUR GAME OF BALL, NO LESS...
THAT'S A LAUGH! THE PAMPERED PRINCE PLAYING WITH GUTTER-URCHINS LIKE US?
HAH! HE'D STAIN HIS FINE CLOAK --MAYHAP EVEN BRUISE HIS LITTLE NOSE!
I'LL PLAY.
AND I'LL WIN.
AND PLAY THE PRINCE DOES, STRIVING WITH AN INTENSITY WHICH AMAZES THE OTHER YOUTHS--
--AND WHICH PUTS EVEN CONN'S RECENT TRAINING EFFORTS TO SHAME.
AND FINALLY, WHEN THE LONG DAY'S GAME IS DONE...
HE...HE WON!
...IT IS NIGHTFALL.
THE WHOLE DAY--?! WE...WE PLAYED ALL DAY LONG?!
HIS STOMACH RUMBLES.
I'VE GOT TO GET TO THE PALACE!
NO DOUBT, SWEET PRINCE--FOR A FEAST OF BOAR OR VENISON KEPT WARM BY YOUR FATHER, EH?
ENOUGH! THE WAY HE PLAYED, HE'S EARNED OUR RESPECT.
AYE, THAT HE HAS--AND SINCE WE'RE GOING THE SAME WAY, WE'LL WALK ALONG.

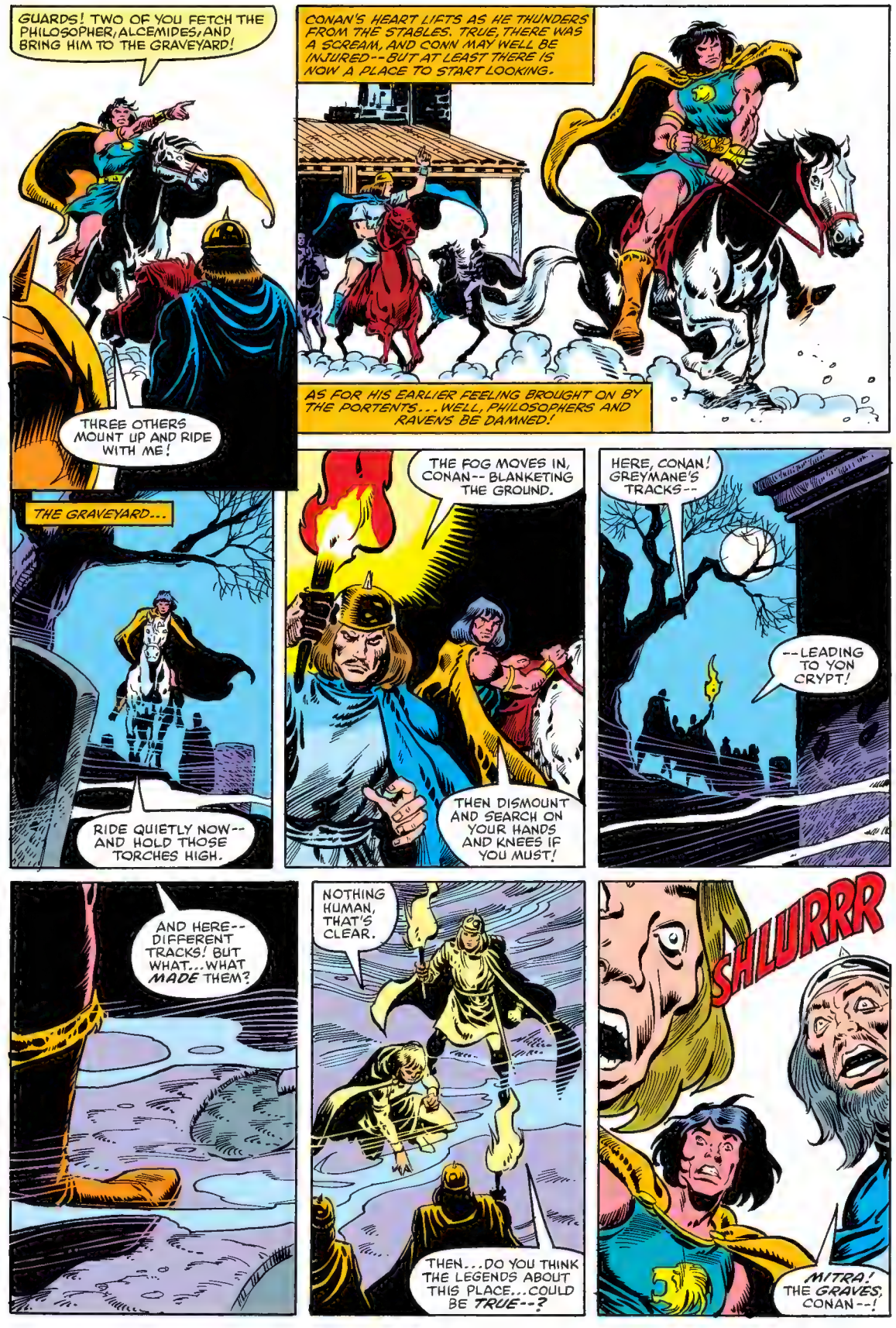

NIGHT DEEPENS TO ITS DARK MAJESTY AS THE YOUTHS REACH THE GRAVEYARD...
HAVE YOU EVER HEARD THE LEGENDS ABOUT THIS PLACE OF BONES, SWEET PRINCE?
'TIS HAUNTED, THEY SAY--BY ALL THE SHADES OF DEATH TRAPPED IN ITS BOSOM.
NAY! BY HIDEOUS DEMONS WHO RISE UP FROM HELL--STRAIGHT THROUGH THE GRAVE DIRT TO CLAIM NEW VICTIMS!
GHOSTS AND DEMONS--? HAH! DO YOU EXPECT THE HEIR TO AQUILONIA TO BELIEVE SUCH HAGS' TALES?
IT'S TRUE!
AYE, BUT IF YOU'D CARE TO DISPROVE IT, SWEET PRINCE, WHY NOT TAKE THE SHORT ROUTE TO THE PALACE--THROUGH THE GRAVEYARD?
VERY WELL--AND IF YOU'D CARE TO JOIN ME AT MY FATHER'S FEAST...
...COME ALONG.
HE...HE'S DOING IT!
MITRA'S EYES!
EASY, GREYMANE--WHAT'S THE MATTER, BOY?
EH--?
THAT SHADOW--FLITTING FROM THE CRYPT!

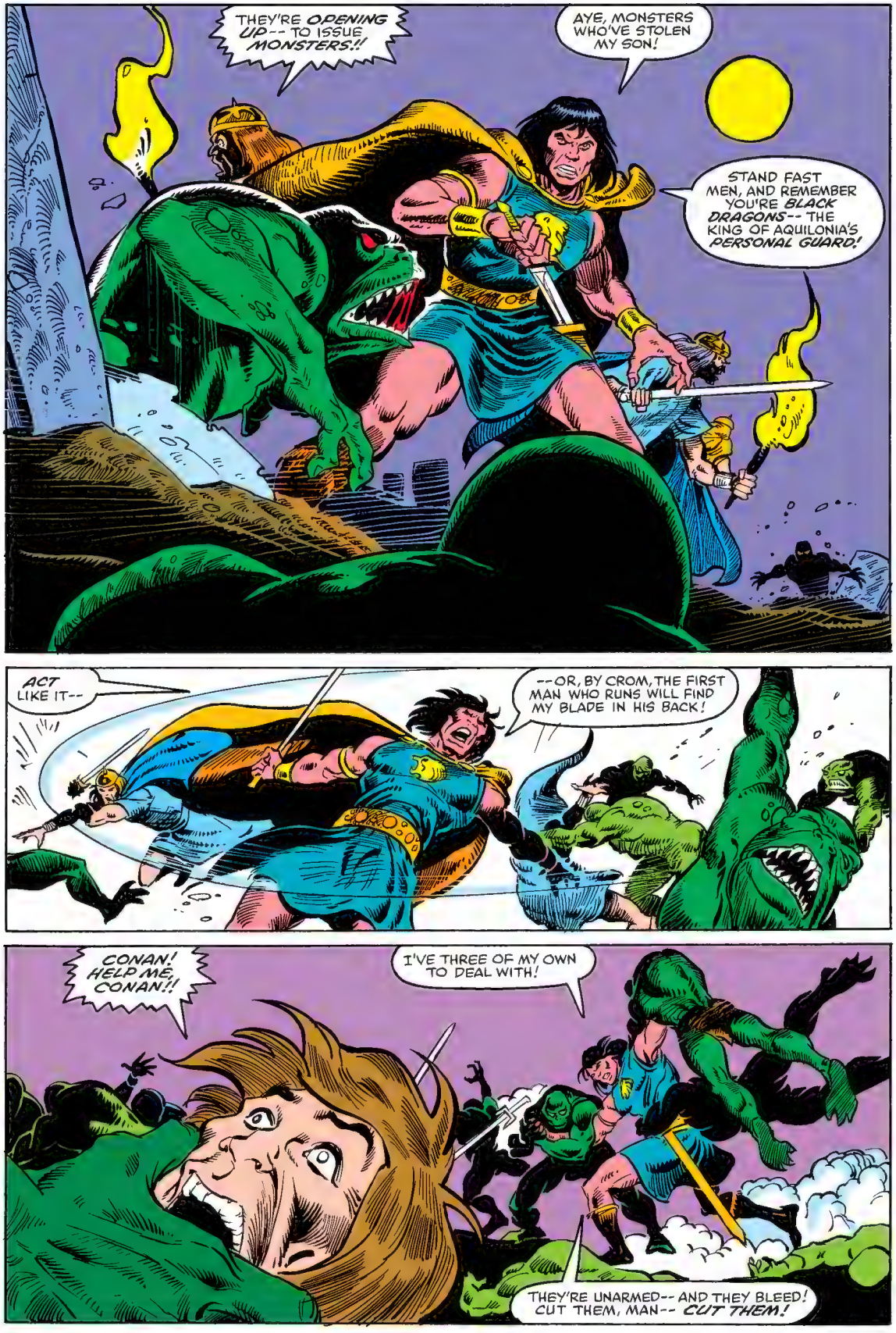

I SWEAR I SAW SOMEONE, GREYMANE... AND BY CROM AND ISHTAR, IF IT'S ONE MY NEW PLAYMATES--
--HE'LL FIND THIS A ROUGHER GAME BY FAR!
HE... HE'S GOING *AFTER* SOMETHING! BEHIND THE CRYPT, AND--
YAHHHHH
RUN! FLEE-- BEFORE THE DEMON CLAIMS *US* AS WELL!
IN THE ROYAL BEDCHAMBER, CONAN PACES LIKE A CAGED LION...
WHERE *IS* HE, ZENOBIA? HE SHOULD HAVE RETURNED TO THE PALACE *LONG* BEFORE DARK!
HE'S BEEN LATE BEFORE, CONAN-- AND YOU'VE NEVER WORRIED LIKE THIS...
I'VE NEVER HAD A *FEELING* LIKE THIS--AS IF... AS IF SOMETHING DANK AND DARK WERE SQUEEZING AT MY VERY HEART...
LIKELY AS NOT, IT'S MERELY SOMETHING STIRRED UP BY THAT MUMBLER ALCEMIDES AND HIS RAVEN OMEN... BUT STILL...

MY KING! I WOULD NOT DISTURB YOU LIKE THIS, BUT--
IS IT ABOUT CONN?! SPEAK, MAN-- 'ERE I TEAR THE WORDS FROM YOUR THROAT!
HIS HORSE, CONAN! IT RETURNED TO THE STABLE... ALONE.
THE KING'S STEEL-BLUE EYES DARKEN UNDER LOWERED BROWS...
I KNEW IT, ZENOBIA--I FELT IT IN MY VERY SOUL...
GREYMANE IS A GOOD MOUNT-- HE'D NEVER RETURN WITHOUT CONN, UNLESS...
DON'T SAY IT, CONAN!
JUST FIND HIM-- FIND OUR SON!
AYE, WIFE, THAT I'LL DO-- E'EN SHOULD ALL THE DEMONS OF HELL STAND IN MY PATH!
BLACKNESS... AND A DIZZY SENSE OF FLOATING. CONN BLINKS HIS EYES...
THE VERTIGO ABATES, BUT BLACKNESS REMAINS...
...SAVE FOR ONE GLOWING ITEM PIERCING THE VOID.
A DOOR... BUT WITHOUT A WALL...!
SHLUURRR
WHAT IN THE NAME OF CROM--? THEY'RE DRAGGING SOMETHING... A MAN!
THE TAVERNKEEP, GROANING SOFTLY.

"NOW THEY...THEY'RE OPENING THE DOOR...AND THE STENCH--IT'S VILE!"
SOMETHING'S COMING OUT--!
SOME SORT OF...MIASMA --TOUCHING HIM...
...WRAPPING AROUND HIM, AND--
NO! IT SWALLOWED HIM--MADE HIM DISAPPEAR!!
THE LORD OF THE VAST SPACE BETWEEN THE STARS HAS TASTED FIRST LIFE.
EH?-? A WOMAN'S VOICE!
BUT SHE... SHE SEEMS TO BE IN A TRANCE...
NOW, SERVANTS OF MURGOR-TSOGGUA --OFFER THE SECOND LIFE.
AS FATE WOULD HAVE IT, THE GUARD BELLUS IS NOT QUITE DEAD AFTER ALL...
N-NO!
NOOOOO
BUT NOW, SLITHERING LIKE ANIMATED MIST, THE FETID TENDRILS RECTIFY FATE'S CRUEL LAPSE...
...AND THE SEETHING MIASMA GLIMPSED BEYOND THE DOORWAY--
--FLASHES BRIGHTER.
NOW THEY...THEY'RE TURNING TOWARD ME!
SHLUURRR
THE LORD MURGOR-TSOGGUA GROWS STRONGER...AND NOW TO COMPLETE HIS ENTRY TO THIS PLANE--
--OFFER THE THIRD AND FINAL LIFE!

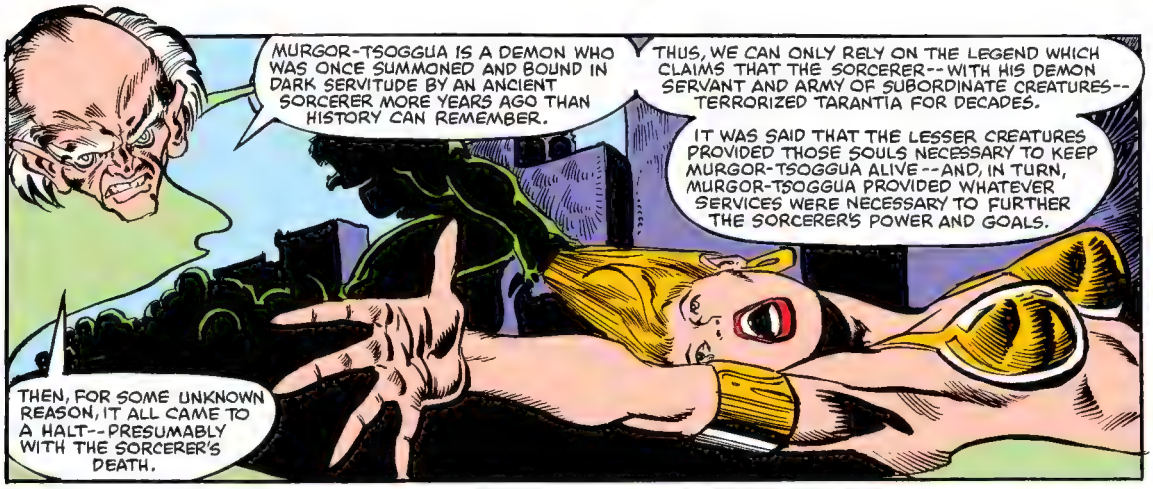
IN THE PALACE STABLES, CONAN VAULTS ONTO HIS STEED...
OPEN THE GATES!
BUT, WHEELING HIS MOUNT--
--HE SPIES THE SHIFT OF A SHADOW WITHOUT.
CROM'S BLOOD! DEVILTRY BEFORE I EVEN LEAVE THE PALACE?!
WHO GOES THERE?!
NOTHING, SAVE THE SOFT SOUND OF STEALTHY MOVEMENT.
ANSWER ME, BY CROM, OR I'LL--
I-IT'S ONLY... M-ME, MY KING...
J-JUST A... GUTTER-URCHIN.
I CAME ABOUT YOUR SON-- THE PRINCE...
YOU'VE SEEN CONN? WHERE?!
WE P-PLAYED A GAME TOGETHER-- AND THEN, WHEN WE PASSED THE GRAVEYARD, WE... UH, CONN DECIDED TO RIDE THROUGH IT-- AND THERE WAS A SCREAM...
CONN'S SCREAM?
Y-YES... I THINK SO-- AND THE OTHERS RAN, BUT I...
WELL, I JUST HAD TO DO SOMETHING.
GOOD LAD. ONE OF MY MEN WILL ESCORT YOU HOME.
NOW-- WHICH GRAVEYARD?
THE ONE DUE NORTH, MY KING.

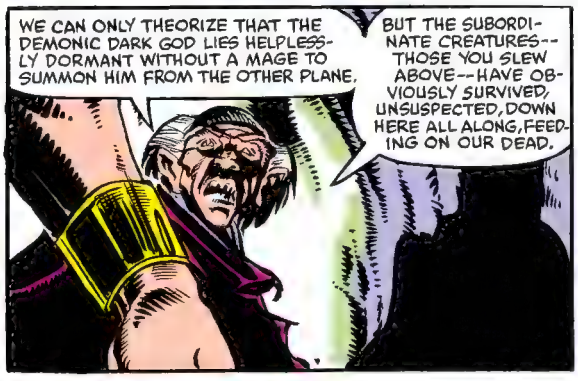

GUARDS! TWO OF YOU FETCH THE PHILOSOPHER, ALCEMIDES, AND BRING HIM TO THE GRAVEYARD!
THREE OTHERS MOUNT UP AND RIDE WITH ME!
CONAN'S HEART LIFTS AS HE THUNDERS FROM THE STABLES. TRUE, THERE WAS A SCREAM, AND CONN MAY WELL BE INJURED--BUT AT LEAST THERE IS NOW A PLACE TO START LOOKING.
AS FOR HIS EARLIER FEELING BROUGHT ON BY THE PORTENTS...WELL, PHILOSOPHERS AND RAVENS BE DAMNED!
THE GRAVEYARD...
RIDE QUIETLY NOW--AND HOLD THOSE TORCHES HIGH.
THE FOG MOVES IN, CONAN-- BLANKETING THE GROUND.
THEN DISMOUNT AND SEARCH ON YOUR HANDS AND KNEES IF YOU MUST!
HERE, CONAN! GREYMANE'S TRACKS--
--LEADING TO YON CRYPT!
AND HERE--DIFFERENT TRACKS! BUT WHAT...WHAT *MADE* THEM?
NOTHING HUMAN, THAT'S CLEAR.
THEN...DO YOU THINK THE LEGENDS ABOUT THIS PLACE...COULD BE *TRUE*--?
SHLURRR
MITRA! THE *GRAVES*, CONAN--!

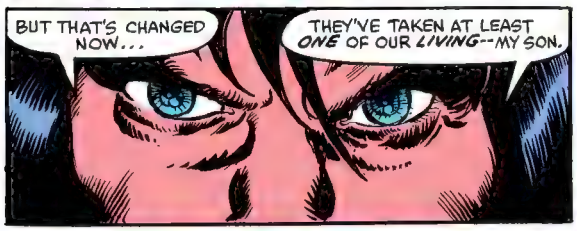

THEY'RE OPENING UP-- TO ISSUE MONSTERS!!
AYE, MONSTERS WHO'VE STOLEN MY SON!
STAND FAST MEN, AND REMEMBER YOU'RE BLACK DRAGONS-- THE KING OF AQUILONIA'S PERSONAL GUARD!
ACT LIKE IT--
--OR, BY CROM, THE FIRST MAN WHO RUNS WILL FIND MY BLADE IN HIS BACK!
CONAN! HELP ME, CONAN!!
I'VE THREE OF MY OWN TO DEAL WITH!
THEY'RE UNARMED-- AND THEY BLEED! CUT THEM, MAN-- CUT THEM!

AND IF YOU CAN'T CUT THEM...
...THEN, BY CROM AND MITRA, GRAB SOMETHING BIG--
--AND CRUSH THEM!
SHLREEEE
TWO WOUNDED, MY KING--BY FANG AND CLAW.
ARE YOU--?
I'M FINE... BUT IF THESE ARE THE THINGS THAT TOOK MY SON--
SORCERY, CONAN!
NAY, ALCEMIDES, AND WHAT TOOK YOU SO LONG?
THESE CREATURES ARE STRANGE ENOUGH, AYE, BUT THEY'RE HARDLY SUPER-NATURAL...
THEY FELL UNDER NAKED STEEL AND STONE AS ANY NATURAL MAN OR BEAST WOULD.
YOU STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND, MY KING--THESE ARE MERE SERVANTS OF THE DARK GOD MURGOR-TSOGGUA! I'VE KNOWN THE LEGEND A LONG TIME...AND NEVER BELIEVED IT...
...BUT THESE THINGS PERFECTLY MATCH ANCIENT DRAWINGS I'VE SEEN, MEANING THE TOMBS UNDER TARANTIA ACTUALLY EXIST--
--AND THE DARK GOD MURGOR-TSOGGUA LURKS THEREIN!
WHAT ARE YOU BABBLING ABOUT, YOU OLD FOOL?!
QUICKLY--WHERE DID THEY COME FROM?!
THEY AMBUSHED US--LYING HIDDEN IN WAIT UNDER A LAYER OF GRAVE DIRT...
NO--NOT UNDER A MERE LAYER OF DIRT, CONAN! THEY CAME FROM THE VERY BOWELS OF THE CITY! DIG OUT ONE OF THE GRAVES--QUICKLY--AND YOU'LL SEE!
YOU'LL SEE!!

AND SO, LONG HOURS PASS UNDER A COLD MOON WHICH HAUNTS DISTANT WOLVES AND JACKALS ALIKE, INSPIRING CRIES TO CHILL THE BLOOD...
MITRA AND ISHTAR! ARE THOSE SHOVELS SO DULL THAT YOU CAN'T--
THE CASKET, MY KING-- WE'VE HIT IT!
THEN WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR, MAN?
OPEN IT-- SO WE CAN SEE IF THIS MUMBLER ALCEMIDES HAS BEEN WASTING OUR TIME WHILE MY SON--
'TIS EMPTY, CONAN-- NOT EVEN A SINGLE BONE!
AND THERE'S A HOLE IN THE BOTTOM, WITH THE SPLINTERS EXTENDING UP-- AS IF IT WERE SHATTERED FROM BELOW!
IT WAS... BY FIENDS HUNGRY TO FEED, YOU'LL FIND EVERY CASKET IN THIS GRAVEYARD EMPTY-- AND UNDER EVERY SHATTERED CASK YOU'LL FIND A TUNNEL LEADING DOWN TO THEIR HAUNT...
...THE TOMB OF THE DEMON MURGOR-TSOGGUA!
BY CROM, THERE IS A TUNNEL UNDER THE CASK-- AND MAYHAP IT LEADS TO WHERE THEY'VE TAKEN CONN!
BRING TORCHES! WE GO DOWN AT ONCE!
MY KING, IF THERE BE MORE OF THOSE CREATURES DOWN HERE, ARE YOU CERTAIN WE SHOULD--
I'M CERTAIN MY SON IS IN PERIL! NOW BE SILENT AND FOLLOW ME--
--EVEN SHOULD I LEAD YOU STRAIGHT TO HELL!
AND WHAT OF YOUR FEARS, ALCEMIDES?
I AM OLD, CONAN, AND I HAVE ALREADY SEEN ENOUGH THINGS TO INSPIRE THE FEAR OF THREE LIFETIMES, BUT NEVER... NEVER HAVE I SEEN A TRUE DEMON.
LOOK AHEAD-- YOU SEE YON BRANCHING TUNNELS?
AYE...
THEY LEAD DOWN FROM THE OTHER GRAVES...
...BUT THEY ALL INTERSECT WITH THIS ONE MAIN TUNNEL...
THUS, AS THE LEGEND STATES, THE ENTIRE HONEYCOMB OF TUNNELS MUST LEAD TO BUT ONE PLACE-- THE VAULT OF THE DARK GOD.
AND JUST WHAT IS THIS LEGEND, ALCEMIDES?
WHO IS THIS DARK GOD?

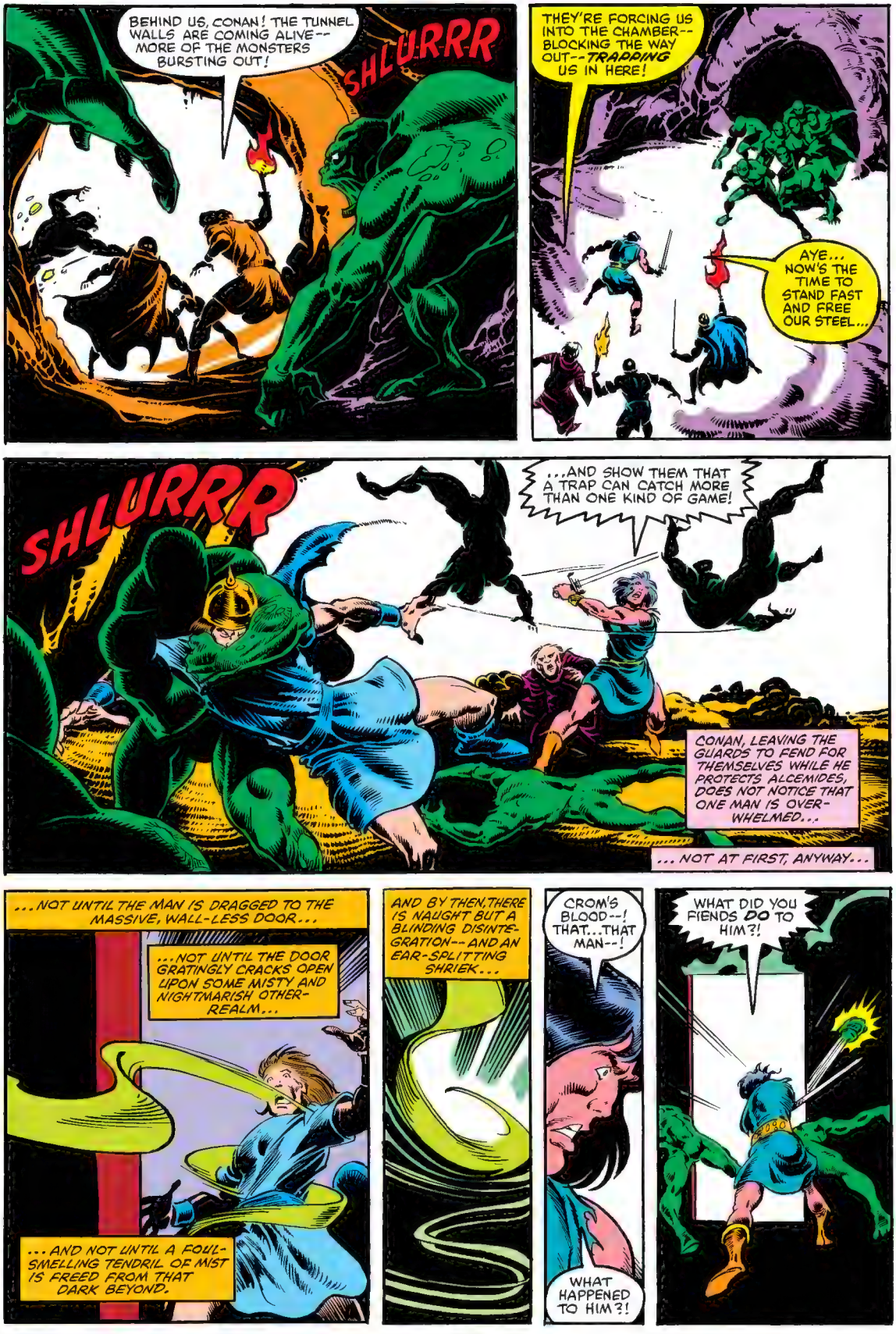

MURGOR-TSOGGUA IS A DEMON WHO WAS ONCE SUMMONED AND BOUND IN DARK SERVITUDE BY AN ANCIENT SORCERER MORE YEARS AGO THAN HISTORY CAN REMEMBER.
THUS, WE CAN ONLY RELY ON THE LEGEND WHICH CLAIMS THAT THE SORCERER--WITH HIS DEMON SERVANT AND ARMY OF SUBORDINATE CREATURES--TERRORIZED TARANTIA FOR DECADES.
IT WAS SAID THAT THE LESSER CREATURES PROVIDED THOSE SOULS NECESSARY TO KEEP MURGOR-TSOGGUA ALIVE--AND, IN TURN, MURGOR-TSOGGUA PROVIDED WHATEVER SERVICES WERE NECESSARY TO FURTHER THE SORCERER'S POWER AND GOALS.
THEN, FOR SOME UNKNOWN REASON, IT ALL CAME TO A HALT--PRESUMABLY WITH THE SORCERER'S DEATH.


WE CAN ONLY THEORIZE THAT THE DEMONIC DARK GOD LIES HELPLESSLY DORMANT WITHOUT A MAGE TO SUMMON HIM FROM THE OTHER PLANE.
BUT THE SUBORDINATE CREATURES--THOSE YOU SLEW ABOVE--HAVE OBVIOUSLY SURVIVED, UNSUSPECTED, DOWN HERE ALL ALONG, FEEDING ON OUR DEAD.

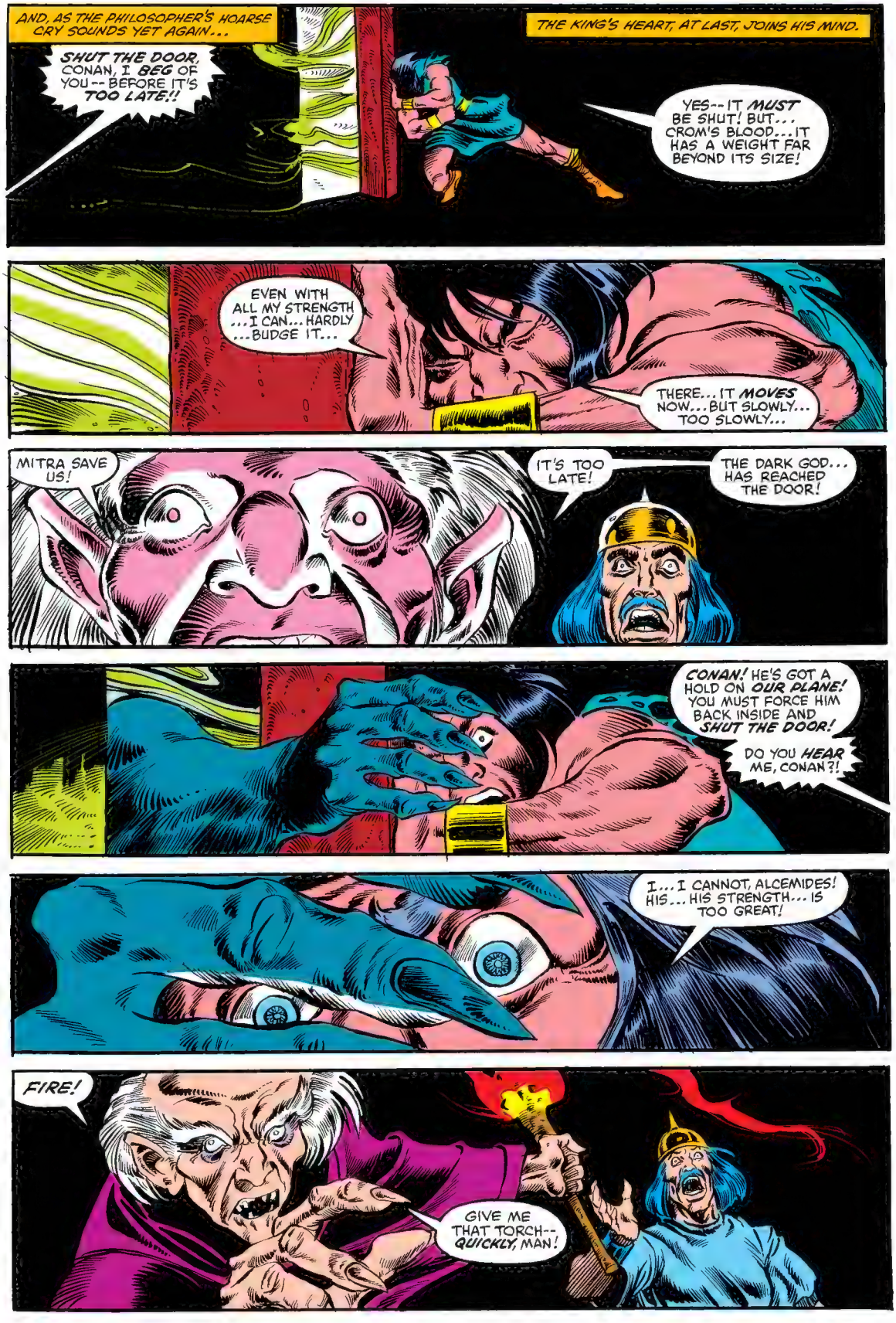

BUT THAT'S CHANGED NOW...
THEY'VE TAKEN AT LEAST *ONE* OF OUR *LIVING*--MY SON.

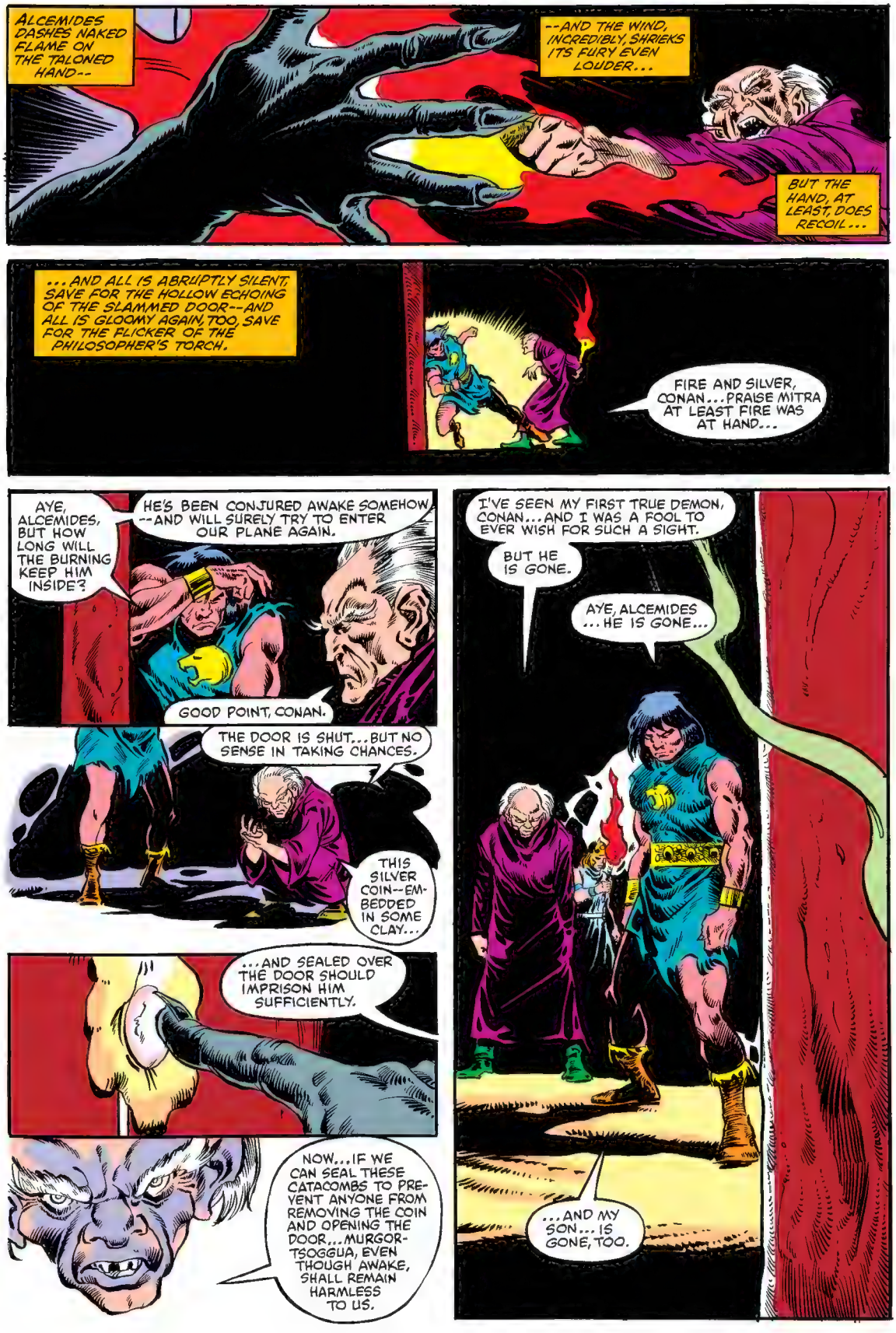
I WARNED YOU LAST NIGHT, CONAN--THE OMENS... THE STARS, THE COMET, THE CRAZED RAVEN...
KEEP YOUR OMENS, ALCEMIDES, AND--
WAIT! THE TUNNEL OPENS INTO A LARGER CHAMBER, AND...

WHAT IN THE NAME OF CROM?! A DOOR--WITHOUT A WALL--STANDING IN THE CENTER OF THE CHAMBER...
THEN IT... IT MUST BE ...THE DOORWAY TO THE DARK GOD'S MYSTICAL PLANE!
SHLURRR

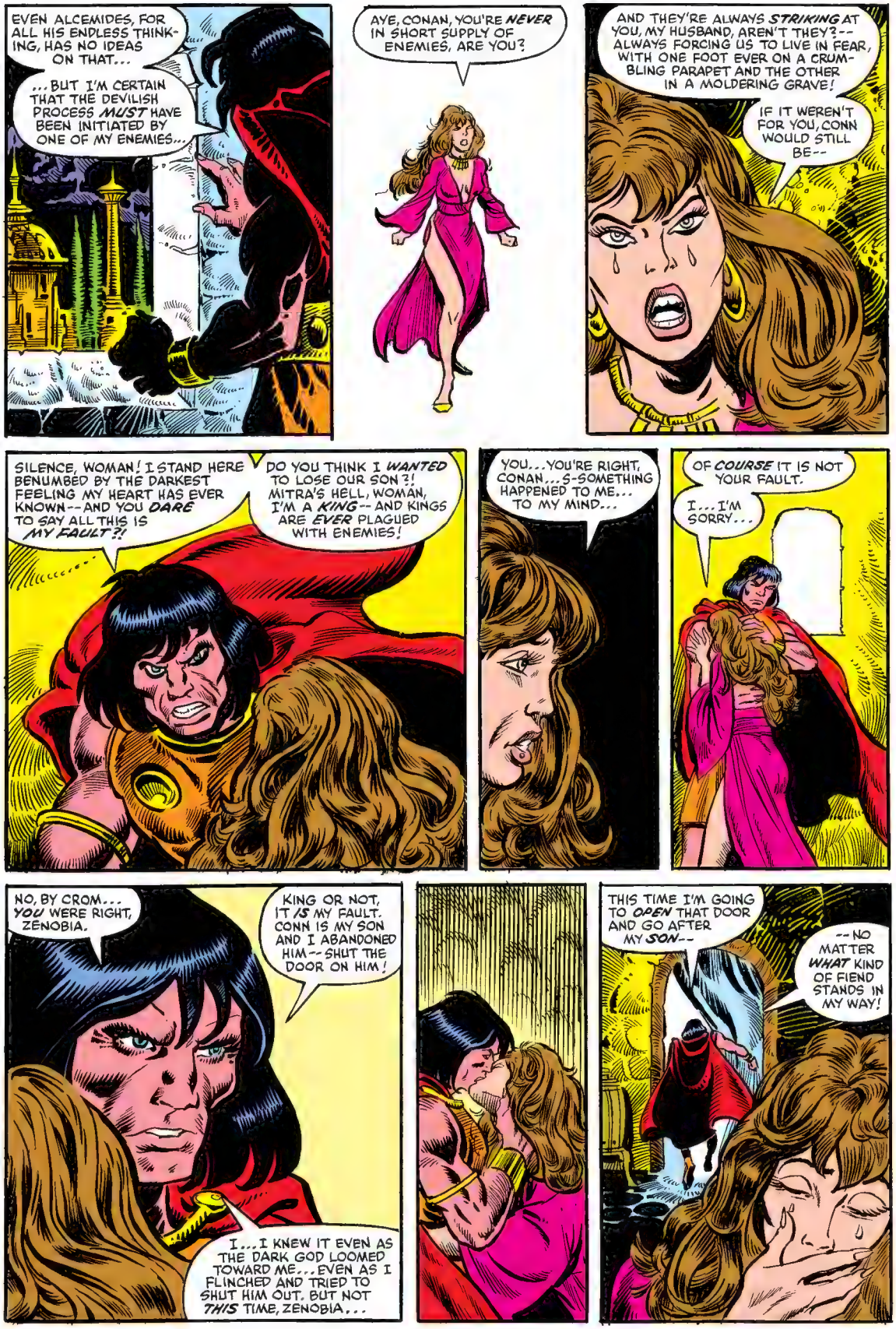

BEHIND US, CONAN! THE TUNNEL WALLS ARE COMING ALIVE-- MORE OF THE MONSTERS BURSTING OUT!
SHLURRR
THEY'RE FORCING US INTO THE CHAMBER-- BLOCKING THE WAY OUT--TRAPPING US IN HERE!
AYE... NOW'S THE TIME TO STAND FAST AND FREE OUR STEEL...
SHLURRR
...AND SHOW THEM THAT A TRAP CAN CATCH MORE THAN ONE KIND OF GAME!
CONAN, LEAVING THE GUARDS TO FEND FOR THEMSELVES WHILE HE PROTECTS ALCEMIDES, DOES NOT NOTICE THAT ONE MAN IS OVER-WHELMED...
...NOT AT FIRST, ANYWAY...
...NOT UNTIL THE MAN IS DRAGGED TO THE MASSIVE, WALL-LESS DOOR...
...NOT UNTIL THE DOOR GRATINGLY CRACKS OPEN UPON SOME MISTY AND NIGHTMARISH OTHER-REALM...
...AND NOT UNTIL A FOUL-SMELLING TENDRIL OF MIST IS FREED FROM THAT DARK BEYOND.
AND BY THEN, THERE IS NAUGHT BUT A BLINDING DISINTE-GRATION--AND AN EAR-SPLITTING SHRIEK...
CROM'S BLOOD--! THAT...THAT MAN--!
WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM?!
WHAT DID YOU FIENDS DO TO HIM?!

THEN COMES A STARK MOMENT MUCH LIKE THE ONE DESTINED TO HERALD WORLD'S END.
THE DOOR FLIES OPEN AND A FIERCE, KEENING WIND SEEMS TO SUCK ALL LIFE FROM THE CHAMBER...AND, TOO, THERE IS THE LIGHT, THE WHITEST AND MOST PAINFUL LIGHT MAN HAS EVER SEEN.
CONAN HEARS NOTHING BUT AN EVER LOUDER ROAR, WHILE HIS EYES ARE ASSAILED WITH THE BRIGHTNESS OF A THOUSAND SUNS.
THEN FROM THE BLINDING MIST STRIDES A HUGE SHAPE WHICH IS SEEN AS NO MORE THAN SHADOW...
...YET THAT DISTORTED GLIMPSE IS MORE THAN ENOUGH TO BRAND IT FAR MORE AWESOME IN ITS HORROR THAN ANY OF THE BATRACHIAN MONSTERS THUS FAR ENCOUNTERED.
ALCEMIDES' VOICE SHRIEKS ABOVE THE HOWLING WIND...
MURGOR-TSOGGUA! THE DARK GOD HIMSELF --RETURNING TO LIFE-- AND THE DOORWAY TO OUR PLANE IS OPEN TO HIM!
FIRE AND SILVER, CONAN! THE ONLY ELEMENTS WITH POWER AGAINST A DEMON!
CONAN MURMURS, "AYE", RECALLING THE DEMON WHICH GUARDED THE TREASURE OF TRANICOS--THE VERY TREASURE WHICH FINANCED THE REVOLT TO SEAT HIM AS KING OF AQUILONIA...
YET EVEN AS THESE MEMORIES SWIRL IN HIS MIND, HE STANDS TRANSFIXED BY WIND AND LIGHT...AND THE DEMON STRIDES CLOSER...
...CLOSE ENOUGH NOW FOR CONAN TO SEE A GIRDLE OF THREE ROUNDISH OBJECTS...
SKULLS--!
THE THING WEARS A BELT OF SKULLS!
CONN! COULD ONE OF THE GRISLY OBJECTS BELONG TO--
THE DOOR, CONAN! SHUT THE DOOR--BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE!!
NO! WHAT... WHAT IF...CONN'S IN THERE?!
IF HE IS, THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN DO FOR HIM!!
WOULD YOU SACRIFICE YOUR ENTIRE KINGDOM IN THE VAIN HOPE OF FINDING A SON WHO IS ALREADY LOST--?!
THERE IS TRUTH IN THE HARSH WORDS, CONAN KNOWS--IN HIS MIND IF NOT HIS HEART...


AND, AS THE PHILOSOPHER'S HOARSE CRY SOUNDS YET AGAIN...
SHUT THE DOOR, CONAN, I BEG OF YOU -- BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE!!
THE KING'S HEART, AT LAST, JOINS HIS MIND.
YES -- IT MUST BE SHUT! BUT... CROM'S BLOOD... IT HAS A WEIGHT FAR BEYOND ITS SIZE!
EVEN WITH ALL MY STRENGTH ...I CAN... HARDLY ...BUDGE IT...
THERE... IT MOVES NOW... BUT SLOWLY... TOO SLOWLY...
MITRA SAVE US!
IT'S TOO LATE!
THE DARK GOD... HAS REACHED THE DOOR!
CONAN! HE'S GOT A HOLD ON OUR PLANE! YOU MUST FORCE HIM BACK INSIDE AND SHUT THE DOOR!
DO YOU HEAR ME, CONAN?!
I... I CANNOT, ALCEMIDES! HIS... HIS STRENGTH... IS TOO GREAT!
FIRE!
GIVE ME THAT TORCH -- QUICKLY, MAN!


ALCEMIDES DASHES NAKED FLAME ON THE TALONED HAND--
--AND THE WIND, INCREDIBLY, SHRIEKS ITS FURY EVEN LOUDER...
BUT THE HAND, AT LEAST, DOES RECOIL...
...AND ALL IS ABRUPTLY SILENT, SAVE FOR THE HOLLOW ECHOING OF THE SLAMMED DOOR--AND ALL IS GLOOMY AGAIN, TOO, SAVE FOR THE FLICKER OF THE PHILOSOPHER'S TORCH.
FIRE AND SILVER, CONAN...PRAISE MITRA AT LEAST FIRE WAS AT HAND...
AYE, ALCEMIDES, BUT HOW LONG WILL THE BURNING KEEP HIM INSIDE?
HE'S BEEN CONJURED AWAKE SOMEHOW --AND WILL SURELY TRY TO ENTER OUR PLANE AGAIN.
GOOD POINT, CONAN.
THE DOOR IS SHUT...BUT NO SENSE IN TAKING CHANCES.
THIS SILVER COIN--EMBEDDED IN SOME CLAY...
...AND SEALED OVER THE DOOR SHOULD IMPRISON HIM SUFFICIENTLY.
NOW...IF WE CAN SEAL THESE CATACOMBS TO PREVENT ANYONE FROM REMOVING THE COIN AND OPENING THE DOOR...MURGOR-TSOGGUA, EVEN THOUGH AWAKE, SHALL REMAIN HARMLESS TO US.
I'VE SEEN MY FIRST TRUE DEMON, CONAN...AND I WAS A FOOL TO EVER WISH FOR SUCH A SIGHT.
BUT HE IS GONE.
AYE, ALCEMIDES ...HE IS GONE...
...AND MY SON...IS GONE, TOO.

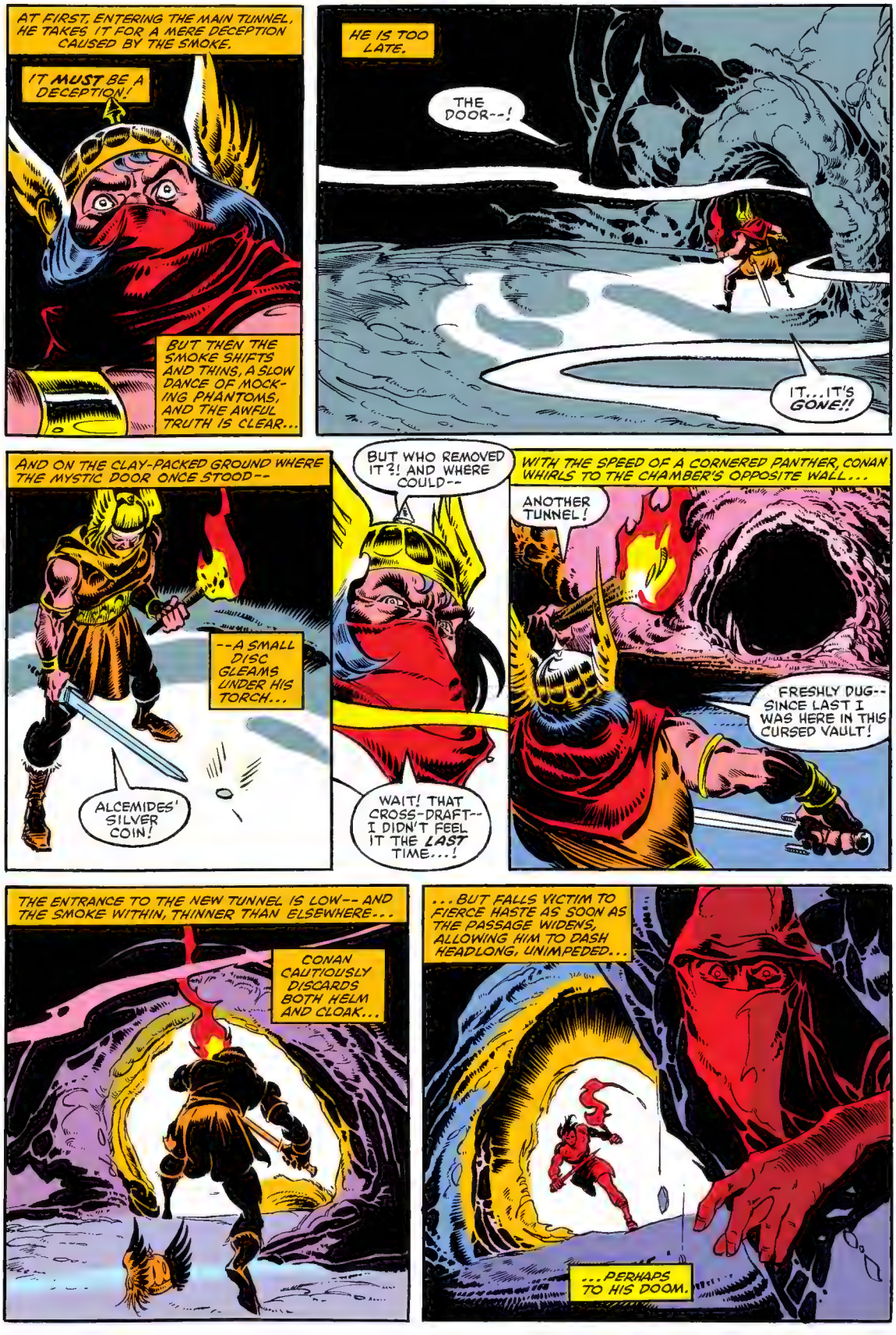
DAWN BRINGS A PRISTINE BRIGHTNESS, UNFETTERED BY CLOUD OR HAZE, BUT FOR CONAN AND HIS QUEEN, THE DAY IS BUT A BLEAK EXTENSION OF THE NIGHT...
HERE, MY KING...
...IN THIS DUSTY TOME I'VE BROUGHT--PICTURES NEARLY IDENTICAL TO THE WEIRDLINGS WE ENCOUNTERED LAST NIGHT.
THE RESEMBLANCE IS UNCANNY--FAR BEYOND THE BOUNDS OF POSSIBLE COINCIDENCE.
IT IS DIFFICULT, FROM THE DULLING ABYSS OF SO MUCH LOSS, TO CONCENTRATE ON ALCEMIDES' INCESSANT MUMBLINGS... AND YET, GLIMMERINGS OF HATE WELL UP FROM THE GREATER GRIEF...
AND HAVE YOU ANY PICTURES OF THE CURSED THING WHOSE HAND I PINNED IN THE DOOR?
HARDLY, MY KING...
NO ONE WHO HAS EVER LAID EYES ON THE DARK GOD HAS LIVED LONG ENOUGH TO REACH EASEL AND PIGMENTS--NO ONE, ANYWAY, SAVE THE SORCERER WHO FIRST SUMMONED MURGOR-TSOGGUA... AND HIS INTERESTS WERE HARDLY ARTISTIC.
HMP.
BUT HERE, MY KING--HERE IS MY PLAN TO FOREVER SEAL THE TOMBS UNDER TARANTIA.
THIS DIAGRAM I'VE PREPARED SHOWS THE TUNNELS LEADING DOWN FROM THE GRAVES TO THE MAIN VAULT WHERE WE DISCOVERED THE DOOR.
I PROPOSE EXCAVATING EACH AND EVERY GRAVE--POURING VAST AMOUNTS OF PITCH DOWN ALL THE TUNNELS--IGNITING THEM WITH TORCHES--AND FINALLY CAPPING EACH GRAVE WITH A LARGE BOULDER.
AFTER SUCH A THOROUGH PROCESS--AND WITH THE DOORWAY SEALED BY SILVER--THE DARK GOD SHOULD CERTAINLY BE CONTAINED ON HIS OWN MYSTICAL PLANE FOR ALL PRACTICAL ETERNITY.
DOES THE EXECUTION OF SUCH A SCHEME MEET WITH YOUR APPROVAL, MY KING?
MY KING...?
CONAN--?
EH? OH... YES, YES, ALCEMIDES... OF COURSE.
DO IT.
AND PLEASE... LEAVE US NOW.
THEN, AS THE PHILOSOPHER QUITS THE HUSHED CHAMBER...
ONE MYSTERY STILL GNAWS AT ME, ZENOBIA--IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT THE DARK GOD WAS REVIVED AFTER ONE OR MORE LIVING SACRIFICES WERE OFFERED TO HIM...
...BUT WHO OR WHAT MADE THOSE CREATURES START PREYING ON THE LIVING TO DO SO?


EVEN ALCEMIDES, FOR ALL HIS ENDLESS THINKING, HAS NO IDEAS ON THAT...
...BUT I'M CERTAIN THAT THE DEVILISH PROCESS MUST HAVE BEEN INITIATED BY ONE OF MY ENEMIES...
AYE, CONAN, YOU'RE NEVER IN SHORT SUPPLY OF ENEMIES, ARE YOU?
AND THEY'RE ALWAYS STRIKING AT YOU, MY HUSBAND, AREN'T THEY?--ALWAYS FORCING US TO LIVE IN FEAR, WITH ONE FOOT EVER ON A CRUMBLING PARAPET AND THE OTHER IN A MOLDERING GRAVE!
IF IT WEREN'T FOR YOU, CONN WOULD STILL BE--
SILENCE, WOMAN! I STAND HERE BENUMBED BY THE DARKEST FEELING MY HEART HAS EVER KNOWN--AND YOU DARE TO SAY ALL THIS IS MY FAULT?!
DO YOU THINK I WANTED TO LOSE OUR SON?! MITRA'S HELL, WOMAN, I'M A KING--AND KINGS ARE EVER PLAGUED WITH ENEMIES!
YOU...YOU'RE RIGHT, CONAN...S-SOMETHING HAPPENED TO ME... TO MY MIND...
OF COURSE IT IS NOT YOUR FAULT.
I...I'M SORRY...
NO, BY CROM... YOU WERE RIGHT, ZENOBIA.
KING OR NOT, IT IS MY FAULT. CONN IS MY SON AND I ABANDONED HIM--SHUT THE DOOR ON HIM!
I...I KNEW IT EVEN AS THE DARK GOD LOOMED TOWARD ME...EVEN AS I FLINCHED AND TRIED TO SHUT HIM OUT. BUT NOT THIS TIME, ZENOBIA...
THIS TIME I'M GOING TO OPEN THAT DOOR AND GO AFTER MY SON--
--NO MATTER WHAT KIND OF FIEND STANDS IN MY WAY!

SOON, THE BITTER SCENT OF RAGE FILLING CONAN'S SOUL GIVES WAY TO THE ACRID FUMES OF MOLTEN METAL...
HO, TAURUS!
MY KING! CAN I BE OF SERVICE TO YOU AGAIN SO SOON--?
IT WILL BE AN HONOR, OF COURSE, TO DO ANYTHING YOU WISH.
YOU HAVE BUT TO SAY THE WORD...
AYE, TAURUS--YOUR RECENT GIFT OF A SWORD SERVED ME IN GOOD STEAD, EVEN IF IT WAS NOT AS TRUE AS MY OWN BLADE.*
I WANT YOU, NOW, TO FORGE ANOTHER--EQUALLY AS GOOD...
*LAST ISSUE--Louise
...FROM THIS!
BUT... MY KING... WHAT IS IT? A...A TREASURE...
SILVER, TAURUS--EACH AND EVERY PIECE.
I WANT THEM SMELTED INTO A SWORD BEFORE NIGHTFALL.
BUT MY KING...THESE GOBLETS... PIECES OF JEWELRY...INGOTS... SURELY THEY ARE PRICELESS!
ARE YOU CERTAIN YOU WANT--
I WANT A SILVER SWORD, TAURUS. BY NIGHTFALL.
I SHALL WAIT FOR IT HERE.
O-OF COURSE, MY KING--I'LL BEGIN AT ONCE.

NIGHTFALL...
HEAVY INDEED, TAURUS, AS YOU WARNED...
BUT FOR MY PURPOSES, IT'S PERFECT.
WELL DONE.
THANK YOU, MY KING.
BUT...MAY I ASK WHAT YOU PLAN TO DO WITH SUCH A SWORD?
I PLAN, TAURUS...
...TO GO DOWN FIGHTING.
THE GLOW HAS BEEN EVIDENT FROM HALFWAY DOWN THE NARROW STREET-- BUT NOW, AS CONAN CLATTERS FROM COBBLES INTO GRAVEYARD, THE FULL SIGHT JOLTS HIS HEART WITH SHOCK.
PILLARS OF FIRE-- RISING FROM THE GRAVES!
OF COURSE-- ALCEMIDES' PLAN! ISHTAR CURSE THE MUMBLER FOR BEING SO EFFICIENT--
--AND CROM CURSE ME FOR BARELY HEEDING HIS INTENTIONS!

HO, MEN-- HALT YOUR WORK! STAY THAT TORCH!
IT'S THE KING HIMSELF!
AYE-- NO MISTAKING THAT FIGURE!
AT LEAST YOU HAVEN'T IGNITED ALL THE TUNNELS, PHILOSOPHER.
NO, CONAN, NOT YET... BUT WHAT--
STILL, YOU HAVE FILLED THEM ALL WITH PITCH, I SEE.
IT'LL BE STICKY GOING, THEN, BUT AT LEAST PASSABLE.
PASSABLE? WHAT ARE YOU-- THAT SWORD YOU WEAR! IT'S MADE OF SILVER!
AYE-- THE PUREST SILVER AQUILONIA'S ROYAL VAULTS CONTAINED.
THEN YOU... YOU MEAN TO ENTER THE CATACOMBS... THE TOMB OF THE DARK GOD... AND... AND OPEN THE DOOR...!
BUT YOU CANNOT, CONAN! I BEG YOU-- YOU CAN'T DO IT!
JUST TRY TO STOP ME, ALCEMIDES.
SCREENED BY CLOAK MUFFLING MOUTH AND NOSE, THE SMOKE-LACED AIR IS AT LEAST BREATHABLE...
...BUT WHAT IF THE FUMES SHOULD BUILD TO THE FLASH POINT? WHAT IF--
KING CONAN SHRUGS, NEVER BREAKING STRIDE, HOLDING THE TORCH HIGH IN AN UNWAVERING GRASP... AND CONTINUES ONWARD.
THE MAIN CHAMBER, AND THE DOOR, YET LIES AHEAD.


AT FIRST, ENTERING THE MAIN TUNNEL, HE TAKES IT FOR A MERE DECEPTION CAUSED BY THE SMOKE.
IT MUST BE A DECEPTION!
BUT THEN THE SMOKE SHIFTS AND THINS, A SLOW DANCE OF MOCKING PHANTOMS, AND THE AWFUL TRUTH IS CLEAR...
HE IS TOO LATE.
THE DOOR--!
IT...IT'S GONE!!
AND ON THE CLAY-PACKED GROUND WHERE THE MYSTIC DOOR ONCE STOOD--
--A SMALL DISC GLEAMS UNDER HIS TORCH...
ALCEMIDES' SILVER COIN!
BUT WHO REMOVED IT?! AND WHERE COULD--
WAIT! THAT CROSS-DRAFT--I DIDN'T FEEL IT THE LAST TIME...!
WITH THE SPEED OF A CORNERED PANTHER, CONAN WHIRLS TO THE CHAMBER'S OPPOSITE WALL...
ANOTHER TUNNEL!
FRESHLY DUG--SINCE LAST I WAS HERE IN THIS CURSED VAULT!
THE ENTRANCE TO THE NEW TUNNEL IS LOW--AND THE SMOKE WITHIN, THINNER THAN ELSEWHERE...
CONAN CAUTIOUSLY DISCARDS BOTH HELM AND CLOAK...
...BUT FALLS VICTIM TO FIERCE HASTE AS SOON AS THE PASSAGE WIDENS, ALLOWING HIM TO DASH HEADLONG, UNIMPEDED...
...PERHAPS TO HIS DOOM.

AS HAPPENED DURING HIS FORAY INTO THIS SUB-TERRANEAN MAZE, THE TUNNEL WALL COMES ALIVE--AND HE FREEZES AS DIRT ABRUPTLY EXPLODES OUTWARD, REVEALING A HIDDEN POCKET...
...AND FROM THE MOIST RECESS TUMBLES--
CROM'S BLOOD! ANOTHER OF THE MONSTERS!
NO, FATHER-- 'TIS ME!
CONN--?!
CONN!
YOU'RE ALIVE, SON!
ALIVE!
BUT MITRA, SON-- I'D ALMOST SPIT YOU UPON A LENGTH OF SHARP SILVER!
WHAT HAPPENED? HOW DID YOU GET FREE? I KNOW THOSE VILE WEIRDLINGS CAPTURED YOU IN THE GRAVEYARD AND BROUGHT YOU DOWN HERE TO FEED THEIR DARK GOD--
AYE, FATHER, THOUGH "FEED" IS NOT QUITE THE PROPER WORD...
THEY NEEDED THREE SOULS TO BRING MURGOR-TSOGGUA BACK TO LIFE--AND I WAS TO BE THE THIRD--BUT WHEN I SAW WHAT WAS BEHIND THAT DOOR, I PLAYED POSSUM AS THEY CAME FOR ME...
"THEN I SURPRISED ONE, THREW HIM INTO THE OTHERS--AND RAN! THEY CHASED ME THROUGH THE TUNNELS FOR HOURS, BUT I ALWAYS MANAGED TO STAY AHEAD OF THEM...
"THEN I WATCHED FROM HIDING AND SAW HOW THEY GO TO SLEEP IN THESE POCKETS IN THE TUNNEL WALLS, SEALING THEMSELVES IN WITH A LAYER OF DIRT..."

WHEN THEY STARTED DIGGING THIS NEW TUNNEL, I USED THEIR OWN TRICK--SEALED MYSELF IN THE SIDE--AND I'VE HID THERE EVER SINCE!
GOOD LAD! YOUR MOTHER AND I THOUGHT YOU WERE LOST!
BUT CONAN'S JOYFUL EYES SWIFTLY CLOUD...
THEN THE THIRD LIFE THEY NEEDED WAS PROVIDED BY MY GUARD--THE ONE I LOST IN THE CHAMBER BATTLE--AND THAT'S WHY MURGOR-TSOGGUA WAS THEN ABLE TO...
TELL ME, CONN, WHAT IS THIS TUNNEL? WHAT DO THEY USE IT FOR?
I KNOW NOT, FATHER, BUT LESS THAN AN HOUR AGO A HORDE OF THEM PASSED MY HIDING PLACE--WITH THE GIRL WHO LEADS THEM...
...THOUGH SHE SEEMS TO BE IN A TRANCE OF SOME SORT, A PUPPET OF SOME UNKNOWN FORCE.
A GIRL? HAVE YOU EVER SEEN HER BEFORE?
NO.
HMP--THEN LET'S SEE WHERE THEY WENT.
TAKE MY DIRK, LAD, AND STAY CLOSE TO ME.
BUT IT IS NOT LONG BEFORE THE KING FREEZES IN DREAD...
MITRA AND ISHTAR--IT CURVES HERE--CURVES TO THE EAST!
WH-WHAT IS IT, FATHER?
EAST, LAD--DON'T YOU KNOW WHERE YOU ARE?!
THIS CURSED TUNNEL HEADS STRAIGHT TO THE PALACE--AND YOUR MOTHER!
FATHER AND SON BOTH RACE THROUGH THE CLAY BURROW NOW, NEITHER SAYING ANOTHER WORD UNTIL THE WAY BREAKS UPWARD, TOWARD A ROUGH CIRCLE OF LIGHT...
AYE, THEY'VE BEEN HERE, ALL RIGHT, THE DEVILS...
BUT THEY'RE GONE NOW. COME, LAD...
FATHER--!
IN MITRA'S NAME, FATHER--WHAT HAS HAPPENED?!

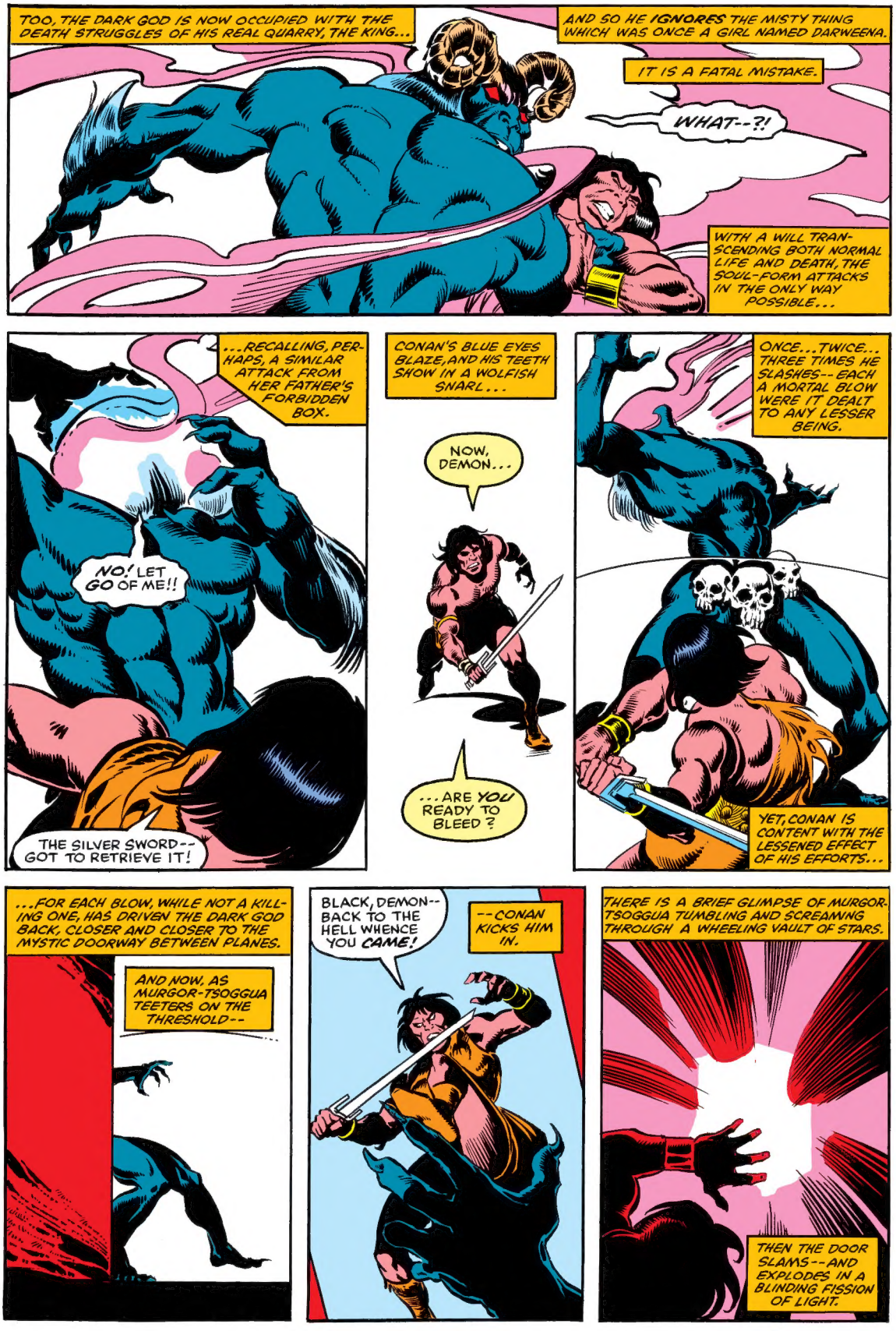
CONAN GROWLS HIS REPLY...
WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE? DEATH, CONN... BLOODY DEATH.
A FULL SCORE OF PALACE GUARDS--AND ENOUGH OF THE WEIRDLINGS TO PROVE THAT OUR MEN FOUGHT BITTERLY TO THE END.
A BLOOD-TRAIL--EVEN MORTAL WOUNDS COULDN'T KEEP THE FIENDS FROM THEIR MISSION...
FATHER! THAT LIGHT AROUND THE CORNER--!
IT'S THE SAME LIGHT THAT CAME FROM THE DOOR!
AND THE ROYAL BEDCHAMBER IS AROUND THAT CORNER!
THE LIGHT IS COMING FROM MOTHER'S ROOM!
AYE.
A SINGLE FULL-THROATED BELLOW OF OUTRAGE REVERBERATES DOWN THE MARBLE HALL AS CONAN HURTLES AROUND THE CORNER...
HIS VERY BEDCHAMBER--HIS QUEEN, HIS WIFE, HIS LOVE--VIOLATED BY LOATHSOME ENEMIES! IT IS ALMOST TOO MUCH TO BEAR...
...UNTIL HE RECALLS HIS OWN EARLIER WORDS, SPOKEN IN ANGER TO THE WOMAN HE NOW SEEKS TO SAVE: "I'M A KING--AND KINGS ARE EVER PLAGUED WITH ENEMIES!"

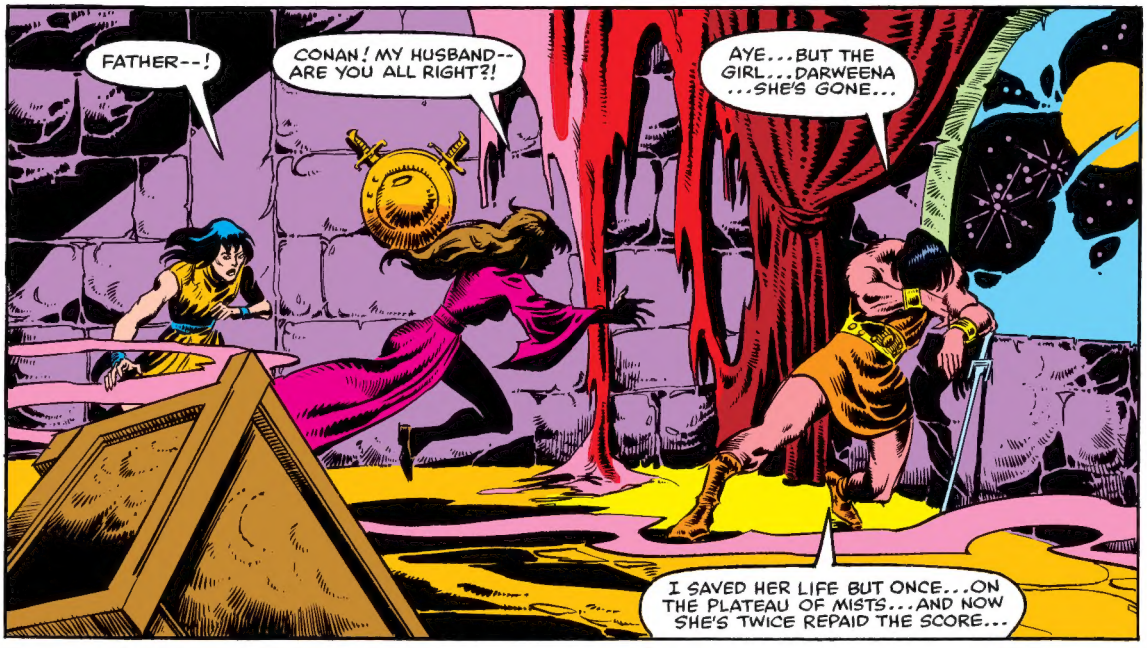
AND THEN, WITH A DEADLY CALM OF PURPOSE--
--THE KING HEFTS HIS SILVER SWORD IN AN IRON GRIP--
--AND, SPRAYING CRIMSON MIST, HACKS HIS WAY THROUGH ENEMIES AND DOORWAY ALIKE.
ZENOBIA!
HERE, CONAN! BUT DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME--I CAN HOLD THEM OFF!
BEHIND YOU, MY HUSBAND--BEHIND YOU!
EH--?
THE VENGEANCE OF THE SORCERER MIMUS, WREAKED UPON CONAN THE KING, NEARS ITS FINAL STAGE...
THAT VOICE!
COME FORTH, MURGOR-TSOGGUA! PASS THROUGH THE DOORWAY BETWEEN PLANES!
ENTER THIS REALM AND FEAST UPON THE BLOOD AND BONES OF CONAN THE KING!
DARWEENA! THE DAUGHTER OF MIMUS!
COME, MURGOR-TSOGGUA!
COME!
AND THE DOORWAY DARKENS... AS THE DARK GOD, IN DEMONIC MAJESTY, BRIDGES NAMELESS GULFS IN BUT A SINGLE STRIDE...

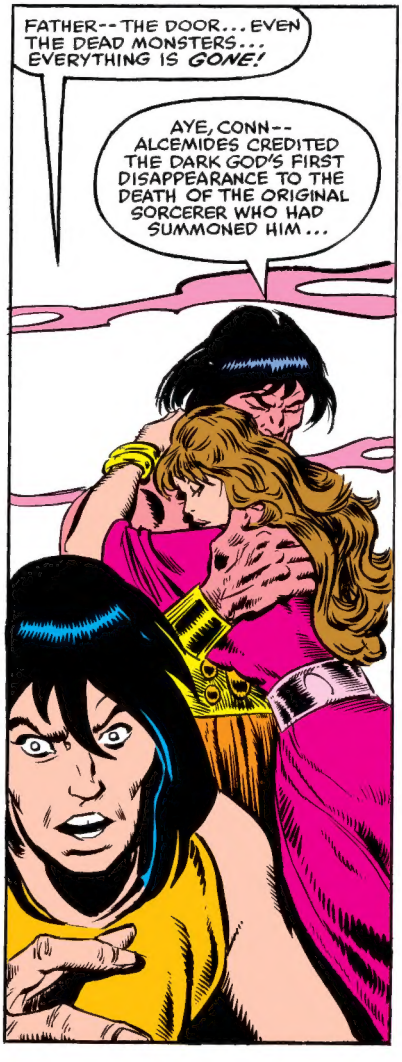
SILENCE SEEMS TO COAT THE CHAMBER, LIKE THICK BLOOD CONGEALING OVER A GLITTERING BLADE, UNTIL CONAN'S RASPING VOICE IS FINALLY HURLED LIKE A CHALLENGE...
MURGOR-TSOGGUA, HEAR ME! I AM CONAN--KING OF THIS LAND YOU HAVE NOW INVADED.
BY BIRTH I AM ALSO A BARBARIAN, ONE OF THOSE PEOPLES--UNLIKE SORCERERS--WHO HAVE ALWAYS KNOWN FEAR IN THE FACE OF THE SUPERNATURAL... YET, IN ME, FEAR HAS EVER BEEN BUT AN EDGE TO FURY.
MY SON STANDS READY TO DEFEND MY WIFE--AND I STAND READY NOT ONLY TO DEFEND THEM BOTH...
...BUT TO SEND YOU BACK, HOWLING, TO THE HELL WHENCE YOU CAME!
AND I, LITTLE KING, LITTLE BARBARIAN... I AM THE DARK GOD MURGOR-TSOGGUA, COME FROM MY PLANE IN THE VAST SPACE BETWEEN THE STARS!
I FEEL NO FEAR, NOR EVEN FURY... AND I SEE BEFORE ME NAUGHT BUT THE ONE I HAVE BEEN SUMMONED TO SLAY...
...AND THE ONE WHOSE BLOOD WILL, AT LAST, SLAKE MY THIRST.
ARE YOU READY, LITTLE KING... TO BLEED?
SLAY HIM, MURGOR-TSOGGUA!
S-SLAY...
...HIM?
AND DARWEENA STIFFENS AS MURGOR-TSOGGUA'S SHADOW CLEARS THE THRESHOLD...
NOW THAT THE DARK GOD HAS BRIDGED THE PLANES, THE SPELL ON HER MIND LIFTS LIKE BREEZE-BLOWN FOG...
WH-WHAT...?
CONAN! MY KING! THE SILVER COIN--I TOOK IT FROM THE DOOR! FORGIVE ME! I COULD NOT CONTROL MYSELF!
IT WAS MY FATHER'S SPELL--ENACTED TO CARRY OUT HIS VENGEANCE EVEN AFTER HIS DEATH! PLEASE FORGIVE ME--!
YOU'RE FORGIVEN, GIRL...

...IF YOU'LL JUST STAND CLEAR OF MY SWORD!
A BLADE OF SILVER--?! THEN YOU KNOW MY WEAKNESS, LITTLE KING?
AYE, DEMON, AND I'LL USE THAT WEAKNESS TO--
YOU'LL DO NOTHING!!
AAGH-H!
CONN--ZENOBIA--MY SWORD!
I...MUST... HAVE...THE SWORD...!

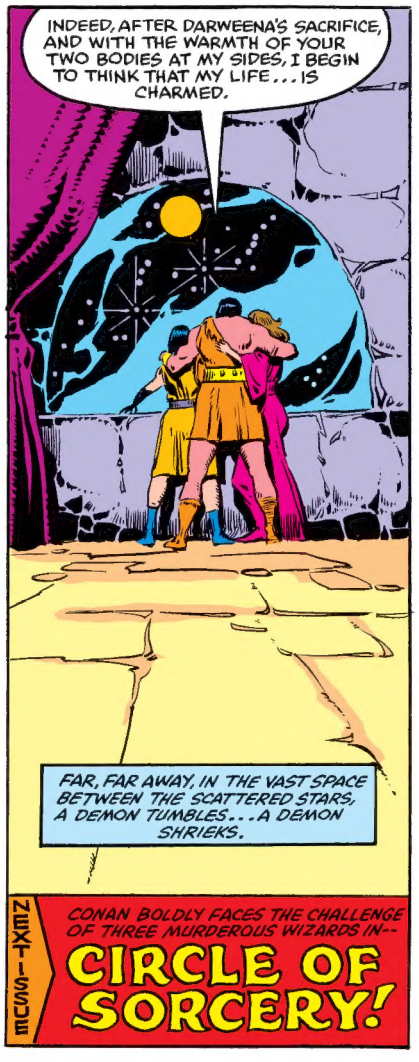
MY WIFE AND SON... IF YOU'VE KILLED THEM, YOU FIEND... I--
SILENCE, LITTLE MAN!
'TIS TIME TO OFFER YOUR VEINS--AND SLAKE THE THIRST OF MURGOR-TSOGGUA!
NOOOOOO
IT'S MY FAULT! I WON'T LET IT HAPPEN!!
DARWEENA WILL NEVER KNOW WHAT POSSESSED HER TO MAKE THE DESPERATE LUNGE--GUILT, VALOR, FEAR, SHEER ALTRUISM, REVERENCE FOR KING, OR EVEN SOME DEEPLY REPRESSED LOVE FOR CONAN THE MAN...
BUT WHATEVER FORM HER POSSESSION HAS TAKEN...
STUPID WOMAN!
...SHE IS GLADDENED, EVEN IN AGONIZING DEATH--
--THAT IT IS A FAR CRY FROM THE POSSESSION SPELLED BY HER FATHER.
THE CLOSE RANGE OF THE TWIN BLASTS, RENDERING HER FLESH INTO MIST, CONVERTS HER LIFE-ESSENCE INTO THE SOUL-FORM FAVORED FOR DIGESTION BY MURGOR-TSOGGUA...
YET THE DARK GOD HAS ALREADY SATED HIMSELF UPON THREE SUCH SOUL-FORMS, AND HAS NO TASTE FOR A FOURTH.


TOO, THE DARK GOD IS NOW OCCUPIED WITH THE DEATH STRUGGLES OF HIS REAL QUARRY, THE KING...
AND SO HE IGNORES THE MISTY THING WHICH WAS ONCE A GIRL NAMED DARWEENA.
IT IS A FATAL MISTAKE.
WHAT--?!
WITH A WILL TRANSCENDING BOTH NORMAL LIFE AND DEATH, THE SOUL-FORM ATTACKS IN THE ONLY WAY POSSIBLE...
...RECALLING, PERHAPS, A SIMILAR ATTACK FROM HER FATHER'S FORBIDDEN BOX.
NO! LET GO OF ME!!
THE SILVER SWORD--GOT TO RETRIEVE IT!
CONAN'S BLUE EYES BLAZE, AND HIS TEETH SHOW IN A WOLFISH SNARL...
NOW, DEMON...
...ARE YOU READY TO BLEED?
ONCE...TWICE...THREE TIMES HE SLASHES--EACH A MORTAL BLOW WERE IT DEALT TO ANY LESSER BEING.
YET, CONAN IS CONTENT WITH THE LESSENED EFFECT OF HIS EFFORTS...
...FOR EACH BLOW, WHILE NOT A KILLING ONE, HAS DRIVEN THE DARK GOD BACK, CLOSER AND CLOSER TO THE MYSTIC DOORWAY BETWEEN PLANES.
AND NOW, AS MURGOR-TSOGGUA TEETERS ON THE THRESHOLD--
BLACK, DEMON--BACK TO THE HELL WHENCE YOU CAME!
--CONAN KICKS HIM IN.
THERE IS A BRIEF GLIMPSE OF MURGOR-TSOGGUA TUMBLING AND SCREAMING THROUGH A WHEELING VAULT OF STARS.
THEN THE DOOR SLAMS--AND EXPLODES IN A BLINDING FISSION OF LIGHT.


FATHER--!
CONAN! MY HUSBAND--ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?!
AYE...BUT THE GIRL...DARWEENA ...SHE'S GONE...
I SAVED HER LIFE BUT ONCE...ON THE PLATEAU OF MISTS...AND NOW SHE'S TWICE REPAID THE SCORE...


FATHER--THE DOOR...EVEN THE DEAD MONSTERS...EVERYTHING IS GONE!
AYE, CONN--ALCEMIDES CREDITED THE DARK GOD'S FIRST DISAPPEARANCE TO THE DEATH OF THE ORIGINAL SORCERER WHO HAD SUMMONED HIM...

AND SINCE DARWEENA CONJURED THE DARK GOD THIS TIME...MURGOR-TSOGGUA HAS AGAIN BEEN BANISHED FROM THIS PLANE-- BY HER DEATH.
NOW, COME--LET'S GAZE AT THE STARS.
I'VE NO DOUBT THAT ALCEMIDES' DIRE CONJURATIONS HAVE CHANGED...FOR THE BETTER.


INDEED, AFTER DARWEENA'S SACRIFICE, AND WITH THE WARMTH OF YOUR TWO BODIES AT MY SIDES, I BEGIN TO THINK THAT MY LIFE...IS CHARMED.
FAR, FAR AWAY, IN THE VAST SPACE BETWEEN THE SCATTERED STARS, A DEMON TUMBLES...A DEMON SHRIEKS.
NEXT ISSUE
CONAN BOLDLY FACES THE CHALLENGE OF THREE MURDEROUS WIZARDS IN--
CIRCLE OF SORCERY!

KING CONAN

% MARVEL COMICS GROUP
387 Park Avenue South
New York, New York 10016

LOUISE JONES
EDITOR
DANNY FINGEROTH
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Dear Louise and the KING CONAN crew,

I was positively elated at seeing KING CONAN #10! Ernie Chan's artwork on "The Fang of Set" was magnificent. I've seen his artwork before, but never on a complete job for Marvel. It's obvious that KING CONAN is a labor of love for Ernie, and, believe me, it shows.

Don't think I'm leaving out Doug, becuase the characterization of Conan as King is very good. He has pointed out that Zenobia is far more important to the kingdom than even Conan cares to admit. It's good that Doug is giving the supporting characters (Trocero, etc.) a sense of reality. Conn's leaving allows a sub-plot for future adventures. In other word's, Doug's doing a great job.

And a few final words to Louise, to compliment her for tying this whole issue together. Most readers don't realize how big a job it is to coordinate all the plots, stories, art and deadlines, and it must be even more difficult on KING CONAN. Being from the 12¢ comic generation, I'm anxious to get as much for my buck as possible, and you always make sure I do. I hope you'll stick around to guide the KING CONAN team for a long, long time. Thanks.

Gordon Manley
P. O. Box 30211
Portsmouth, VA 23701

Shucks, Gordon, editing's hard, but it does have its rewards. After all where else would we get to read such nice letters? Thanks to you, too.

Dear Hyborians,

Why is KING CONAN the best Conan title of all?

1) The art. Both Buscema and Chan portray Conan's world in all the barbaric splendor it deserves.

2) The writing. Doug Moench has a great feel for the prose that Conan's creator, Robert E. Howard, used to depict Conan's adventures. It is colorful and very dramatic without being corny — a difficult feat. He also manages to make Conan say believably intelligent things, something that other writers sometimes have difficulty with.

3) Respect for Robert E. Howard. I appreciate this most of all. You guys are using the characters and setting of Howard's Hyborian age without distorting them. Bravo.

4) Size. The large size of KING CONAN gives our hero lots of room to move around in. Story and character development can, and does, occur. Conan, the epic hero, fits best in an epic format.

I hope that's praise enough to hold you for a little while. The only thing you could do to please me further would be to produce more continued stories and to cook up some new, suitably nasty villains, with a life expectancy of more than one issue.

Chris Hocking
434 Anderson
Ann Arbor, MI 48109

Fortunately for you, Chris — and *un*fortunatley for the King — there are some villains at work even now, plotting doom and destruction for Conan, who have a life expectancy of much more than one issue. They're gonna keep you *both* on your toes!

Dear King Conan Chroniclers,

You've done it. I don't know how, but KING CONAN #10 somehow brought me the same feeling of magic as the first time I read the CONAN comic book. I've been buying KING CONAN mainly for John Buscems's artwork. Now you've given me two different reasons: Doug Moench's writing and Ernie Chan's art. Both are fantastic, and I hope to see them around for a long time. The new book has a new magic, similar to the old but different enough to be completely refreshing. You two have what it takes. Thanks for the magic.

Kevin Armstrong
Rte. 3
New Philadelphia, OH 44663

Dear Doug, Ernie and Louise,

When I pick up a copy of KING CONAN, I get the feeling that I used to get when I began reading Conan all those many years ago: a feeling of excitement and satisfaction and of knowing I'll be pleased. Any chance of getting Doug to script *all* Conan books? How about bringing back good old SAVAGE TALES in the dollar format? It could have stories of Prince Conn, Red Sonja, Kull, Chane, Bront and any other barbaric stars you have, two stories per issue on a rotating basis. And after two years, don't you think it's time we had a title for a letters page?

Al Anderson
707 South Spring St.
Talladega, Al 35160

Get Doug to write all the Conan titles? With all the work he's got on THOR, MASTER OF KUNG FU, and MOON KNIGHT, we just don't think he has the time. As for your other suggestions, we probably won't be bringing back SAVAGE TALES, but we do have an announcement to make in the near future that will definitely be to your liking. And you're absolutely right; it is time this page had a title. Any suggestions?

Dear Louise,

I don't normally buy "barbarian" books, no matter how well drawn. But if the writer is a favorite. . . let me just say that as long as Doug Moench stays with KING CONAN, you have a convert here. By the way, the art is fine, but it's Doug's characterizations that are really attractive. The best way I can describe it is that I feel "comfortable" reading the book, and happy.

C. J. Barragan III
536 Clayton
San Francisco, CA 94117

Welcome aboard, C. J. Now that you've realized the joys of Conan, are you sure we can't interest you in CONAN THE BARBARIAN and SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN? Doug doesn't write 'em — but he *reads* 'em!

Dear Doug and Ernie,

When I first sat down to read my brand new mags, I noticed that Big John Buscema didn't draw it. CATASTROPHE! But I soon calmed down when I saw that my favorite inker, Ernie Chan, did the pencils and inks. WOW! Conclusion? Fabulous scripting + superb art = great issue.

Rick Davis
101 Ornida Ave.
Beaver, PA 15009

We're glad your story came to a happy ending, but we fully understand your obsession with John B. — which is why we're happy to announce that he's returning to pencil *and* ink CONAN THE BARBARIAN with issue #140, as well as penciling SAVAGE SWORD again, virtually every issue. (And did we mention that he adapted, drew and colored MARVEL SUPER SPECIAL #21, THE CONAN MOVIE, which was deftly scripted by Michael Fleisher? It should be on your newsstands about the time you read this.)

Before we forget, next issue features a special art job by newcomer Marc Silvestri, who made his dynamic debut in CONAN #135. Be here, you just might enjoy it.